

PHOTOGRAPHY AFTER CONCEPTUAL ART

EDITED BY DIARMUID COSTELLO
AND MARGARET IVERSEN

PHOTOGRAPHY AFTER CONCEPTUAL ART

Photography after Conceptual Art Edited by Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen
 ISBN: 978-1-444-33360-2

Art History Special Issue Book Series

In this distinctive series, developed from the annual special issue of *Art History*, leading scholars are invited to publish new research on key issues and to reflect on contemporary concerns in the discipline. Each collection of essays takes a particular theme and the scope is wide: from painting and sculpture to photography and video, urban history and architecture, institutions, collecting, and historiography.

Titles in the series include:

Art and Architecture in Naples, 1266–1713: New Approaches
Edited by Cordelia Warr and Janis Elliott

About Mieke Bal
Edited by Deborah Cherry

Spectacle and Display
Edited by Deborah Cherry and Fintan Cullen

Location
Edited by Deborah Cherry and Fintan Cullen

About Stephen Bann
Edited by Deborah Cherry

Between Luxury and the Everyday: Decorative Arts in Eighteenth-Century France
Edited by Katie Scott and Deborah Cherry

Art: History: Visual: Culture
Edited by Deborah Cherry

Difference and Excess in Contemporary Art: The Visibility of Women's Practice
Edited by Gill Perry

Other Objects of Desire: Collectors and Collecting Queerly
Edited by Michael Camille and Adrian Rifkin

Fingering Ingres
Edited by Susan Siegfried and Adrian Rifkin

About Michael Baxandall
Edited by Adrian Rifkin

PHOTOGRAPHY AFTER CONCEPTUAL ART

EDITED BY

DIARMUID COSTELLO
AND
MARGARET IVERSEN





This edition first published 2010

Edition history: originally published as Volume 32, Issue 5 of *Art History*

Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

Registered Office
John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

Editorial Offices
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK
The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer services, and for information about how to apply for permission to reuse the copyright material in this book please see our website at www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data is available for this book.

9781444333602 (paperback)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Set in 10/12pt SwiftEF-Regular by Macmillan India Ltd., Bangalore, India
Printed in Singapore

01 2010

CONTENTS

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Wolfgang Brückle works as an AHRC research fellow for the *Aesthetics after Photography* project at the University of Essex. His publications include *Civitas terrena: Staatsrepräsentation und politischer Aristotelismus in der französischen Kunst 1270–1380* (Munich, 2005) and essays on medieval and early modern art and theory as well as on contemporary art and the history of photography and film. He co-curated *Von Rodin bis Baselitz: Der Torso in der Skulptur der Moderne* (Stuttgart, 2001) and *Brennpunkt Schweiz. Positionen in der Videokunst seit 1970* (Bern, 2005).

Christine Conley is an independent curator and lecturer in History and Theory of Art at the University of Ottawa. Her research involves issues of gender, allegory, trauma and cultural memory. She has published essays in books, journals and exhibition catalogues on artists Mary Kelly, Charlotte Salomon, Joyce Wieland, performance artist May Chan, Ed Pien and the Vancouver-based photo conceptual artist Theodore Wan. An essay on Rebecca Belmore and Faye HeavyShield is forthcoming in Jonathan Harris ed. *Inside the Death Drive: Excess and Apocalypse in the World of the Chapman Brothers*, Liverpool, 2009.

Diarmuid Costello is Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Warwick. He co-edited (with Dominic Willsdon) *The Life and Death of Images: Ethics and Aesthetics* (Tate/Cornell, 2008) and (with Jonathan Vickery) *Art: Key Contemporary Thinkers* (Berg, 2007). His articles at the intersection of aesthetics and art theory have appeared in *The British Journal of Aesthetics, Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Critical Inquiry, Rivista di Estetica, Angelaki, Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art, Philosophy Compass* and various collections. He is working on two longer projects, *Aesthetics after Modernism* and *On Photography*. He is Co-Director (with Margaret Iversen) of the AHRC research project 'Aesthetics after Photography'.

Mark Godfrey is a Curator at Tate Modern. He is the author of *Abstraction and the Holocaust* (Yale University Press, 2007) and of *Anri Sala* (Phaidon, 2006). He curated the exhibitions *Douglas Huebler* (Camden Arts Centre, 2002), *Matthew Buckingham: Play the Story* (Camden Arts Centre, 2007), and *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn* (Tate Modern, 2009). He contributes regularly to *October*, *Frieze*, *Artforum*, and *Parkett*, and has recently published essays on Christopher Williams, Zoe Leonard, Tacita Dean, Sharon Lockhart, Ceal Floyer, and Simon Starling. He is currently working on a monograph about Alighiero E Boetti, and on a retrospective for Tate Modern of the work of Francis Alÿs.

Gordon Hughes is a Mellon Assistant Professor in art history at Rice University. His work has appeared in *The Art Bulletin*, *October*, *Art Journal*, and *Oxford Art Journal.* He is also the editor, with Hal Foster, of October Files: Richard Serra. He is currently completing a book on Cubism and Robert Delaunay's early abstraction.

Margaret Iversen is Professor in the Department of Art History and Theory, University of Essex, England. Her most recent book is *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes* (2007. Her other

published books include Alois Riegl: *Art History and Theory* (1993); *Mary Kelly* co-authored with Douglas Crimp and Homi Bhabha, (1997); *Art and Thought*, edited and introduced with Dana Arnold (2003). Forthcoming books are *Writing Art History* (co-authored with Stephen Melville) and *Chance*. She is Director (with Diarmuid Costello) of a three-year inter-disciplinary AHRC-funded research project, 'Aesthetics after Photography'.

Sarah Edith James read Social & Political Sciences and the History of Art at King's College, University of Cambridge, then completed an MA and PhD at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London. Her doctoral thesis, which was submitted in 2007, was entitled 'Negative aesthetics: the late art of East & West German photography, after 1968'. She is University Lecturer in History of Art and Tutor, Christ Church College, at the University of Oxford. She was previously an Alexander von Humboldt Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Institut für Kunst- und Bildgeschichte, Humboldt Universität Berlin, and is completing her book manuscript *German Photography: The Demands of Realism & the Aesthetics of Objectivity.* She is a regular contributor to *Art Monthly*, *Art Review* and *Frieze*. Her main areas of research are: German photography, photography and modernism, international photography and theory, German art after 1945, contemporary art, and the aesthetics of Theodor W. Adorno.

Luke Skrebowski is a doctoral candidate at Middlesex University where he studies in the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy and the History of Art and Design Department. He is completing his thesis which reconsiders conceptual art's critical legacy. His work has appeared in *Grey Room* and *Tate Papers.*

Tamara Trodd lectures in History of Art at the University of Cambridge. Her research interests are in twentieth-century and contemporary art with a special focus on photography and artists' film and video. Her publications include articles on Tacita Dean (*Art History*) and Paul Klee (*Oxford Art Journal*) and she is currently completing a book called *Art After Photography.*

Aron Vinegar is Associate Professor in the Department of History of Art at Ohio State University. His research and publications focus on the history and theory of modern architecture and art. His book *I AM A MONUMENT: On Learning from Las Vegas* (MIT, 2008) considers postmodern architecture from the perspective of philosophical skepticism. The chapter appearing in this *Art History* book is part of a larger book project on Heidegger, world-formation, and contemporary photography.



1 Jeff Wall, *Shapes on a Tree*, 1998. Silver gelatin contact print, 24.4 × 19.4 cm. Photo: © Jeff Wall.

Photography after Conceptual Art Edited by Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen
 ISBN: 978-1-444-33360-2

1

INTRODUCTION: PHOTOGRAPHY AFTER CONCEPTUAL ART

DIARMUID COSTELLO AND MARGARET IVERSEN

This *Art History* book aims to open up a debate about what is at stake in contemporary photographic art. It forms part of a large AHRC funded research project, 'Aesthetics after Photography', which focuses on the challenges that recent art photography poses for aesthetic theory. A collaborative and cross-disciplinary endeavour, the research project is directed by Margaret Iversen of the Department of Art History and Theory at the University of Essex and Diarmuid Costello of the Philosophy Department, University of Warwick. They have also guest edited this volume. The chapters' original incarnation was as a two-day session at the annual Association of Art Historians conference held at Tate Britain, London, in 2008. We called for papers that addressed substantive theoretical or aesthetic issues raised by photography of the post-1960s period as an artistic medium, particularly in light of the oft-heard claim that the arts now inhabit a 'post-medium' condition. Our goal was to explore the remarkable shifts in the dominant forms of photography as a mainstream contemporary art, as opposed to a specialist domain, notably the significance of its apparent transformation from anti-aesthetic to aesthetic medium of choice. This can be seen in the way in which the a- or non-aesthetic uses of photography associated with various conceptual, proto-conceptual and post-conceptual practices of the 1960s and 1970s, and their documentation, gave way in the 1980s to the self-consciously 'anti-aesthetic' practices of postmodern appropriation, only to be overtaken in turn by the large-scale, pictorial and frequently digital, colour photography that has dominated photographic art since the 1990s. This last is a form of photography that is often compared to painting in the range of aesthetic effects to which it aspires. Certainly, it has been welcomed by museums, galleries, and the market in these terms.

One way we approached our theme was by taking up Jeff Wall's claim that recent photography represents a turn away from conceptual art – 'the last moment of the pre-history of photography as art' – and exploring its implications. One critical question this raised is whether the majority of recent photographic art is merely 'after' conceptual art in a weak historical sense, or whether it is truly *post*-conceptual in the more substantive sense of not merely coming after, but also internalizing and building upon the lessons of conceptual art. In practice, this has meant dealing with the way photography was conceived within the original conceptual and proto-conceptual practices of, say, Ed Ruscha, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Douglas Huebler and Mel Bochner, on the one hand, and the pictorial

photography of, say, Jeff Wall, Thomas Demand, and Andreas Gursky, on the other. There is still a temptation to see the early book works of Ruscha and the industrial archaeology of the Bechers, in particular, as establishing the conceptual, pictorial, and aesthetic ground upon and from which ambitious photographic art has since developed or diverged. Broadening the scope to consider less often examined exponents of photography within conceptual art complicates this picture. Moreover, some contemporary artists' work can be seen to combine 'pictorial' and 'conceptual' elements: Roni Horn's colour photographic books, for example, fall into this hybrid category. In any case, it was our hunch from the beginning that several of the critical divisions that structure writing on this body of work – between conceptual and pictorial, the aesthetic and the anti-aesthetic, etc. – are frequently over-determined and exaggerated. In their different ways, the chapters collected here explore this hybrid condition.

Given the importance of Ruscha's books for the subsequent history of photography as art, it is not surprising that there are two chapters on the subject that intersect in interesting ways. In her chapter, 'Auto-maticity: Ruscha and Performative Photography', Margaret Iversen argues that the titles of Ruscha's books provide a verbal 'score' to be filled out by specific photographic realizations or performances. His practice is thus tied to a legacy of Duchamp that stems particularly from his instruction-framed piece, *3 Standard Stoppages*. Referring to his groundbreaking 1963 book, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, Ruscha explained that the title was formulated in advance of taking the photographs; in other words, it provided the nub of an instruction which he then duly carried out along Route 66. This suggests that Ruscha was engaged in a very specific kind of artistic activity – that is, following a predetermined route in his car and systematically recording just the gas stations. This pervasive auto-maticity (instruction, car, route, camera) is what makes the books perplexing and different from other photography books such as Robert Frank's *The Americans*. Iversen aims this argument against that offered by Jeff Wall in his essay on conceptual photography, 'Marks of Indifference' – an essay that is frequently cited in this volume. Wall positions the work of Ruscha and other artists of the period in relation to 'non-autonomous', that is, photojournalistic or amateur photography which, Iversen contends, fails to capture his deliberately affectless, depersonalized, repetitious, deadpan use of the camera. By conceiving of the books as instructional performance pieces, Iversen brings out the open-ended, experimental character of other works such as *Thirtyfour Parking Lots* or *Royal Road Test* (both from 1967), where an instruction is performed 'blindly' in order to see what will happen.

Aron Vinegar's chapter is also concerned with Ruscha's photography. In 'Ed Ruscha, Heidegger, and Deadpan Photography', Vinegar connects the frequent use of the term 'deadpan' to describe Ruscha's work with Stanley Cavell's remarks on Buster Keaton's face and Martin Heidegger's notions of mood and attunement. Benjamin Buchloh's influential essay, 'Conceptual Art 1962–69: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions', consolidated the characterization of Ruscha as deadpan, by claiming that Ruscha's photographic practice emerged from Duchamp's and Cage's legacy of an 'aesthetic of indifference', and that his deadpan approach to photography was characterized by the acceptance of a 'universally valid facticity'. However, as Vinegar demonstrates, this vocabulary of 'indifference', 'facticity', and the 'deadpan' has never been

explicitly tied back to its rich vein of philosophical sources. His chapter sets out to do just this by exploring issues of 'indifference', 'equanimity', and 'facticity' set out in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. He also shows how these notions intersect with Stanley Cavell's intriguing comments on Buster Keaton's 'stone face' – his characteristic expression of equanimity when confronted by whatever the world might throw at him. On this reading, deadpan emerges as not so much a mode of rhetorical delivery – and certainly not as ironic – but rather as the sign of a much deeper receptiveness to the world that is perhaps best understood in the light of Heidegger's notion of *Stimmung*, those fundamental moods or attunements characteristic of *Dasein*'s way of being in, and openness towards, the world in which it finds itself. So construed, deadpan is an even-tempered and resolutely non-judgemental receptiveness to the world – hence the 'Every' in *Every Building on Sunset Strip*.

Coming from quite different directions, then, Iversen's and Vinegar's chapters on Ruscha nonetheless converge around the ideas of receptivity and openness and their aesthetic significance. Read together they implicitly point towards deeper aesthetic questions about the embodiment of reflective judgement (in the Kantian sense of that term) in art. Given the themes of Vinegar's chapter, it is notable that Heidegger glosses the notion of 'disinterestedness' fundamental to Kant's theory of aesthetic judgement in terms of the 'unconstrained favouring' and 'free granting' of what appears. Such considerations clearly cut against the a- or non-aesthetic ways in which ideas such as the deadpan have typically been conceived in art history and criticism since the late 1960s.

Sarah James's chapter, 'Subject, Object, Mimesis: The Aesthetic World of the Bechers' Photography', considers the equally influential practice of Bernd and Hilla Becher, regarded by many critics as another foundation stone of photographic art since the 1960s. Taking issue, similarly, with anti-aesthetic portrayals of their work and its underlying motivation, James employs Theodor Adorno's culturally and historically contemporaneous notion of 'mimesis' to foreground the mimetic relation to the world at the core of the Bechers' project – its relentless attempt to embody concretely a form of subjectivity adequate to its objects, and in so doing 'redeem expression' – which she understands in an Adornian light as a somatic responsiveness to the world prior to discursive thought. Examining the recent views of Blake Stimson and Michael Fried on the subjective and objective aspects of the Bechers' photography, she offers an overarching view that would make sense of them both, implying that in so far as the two critical readings she canvasses only capture one side of the relation their work foregrounds, both remain incomplete when taken on their own. To this end, she argues that Adorno's aesthetic thought, notably his central and multivalent category of mimesis, offers a way in which to frame the relation of the subject and the object figured by the Bechers' photography, and in doing so to situate it within the context of a particular moment in German history. In this way, the Bechers' rejection of subjectivity and their pursuit of an objective photography are contextualized in relation to the 'post-Auschwitz taboo on beauty', and the ideology of anti-ideology that dominated West German cultural politics of the 1950s. Hence, despite the obvious differences between the context and meaning of the Bechers' use of photography and Ruscha's, here, too, an ethics of receptivity and openness to the world and the objects within it is evidently in play.

Moving on from these influential proto-conceptual practices, the next pair of chapters looks closely at individual projects in the less widely examined practices of Douglas Huebler and Mel Bochner. Gordon Hughes's chapter focuses on the shift from Huebler's early systems-based photographic work to his later use of photographic portraiture as a means to undercut the very systems that apparently govern his practice. To this end, he shows how the work reveals its anti-systematic nature by flouting its self-imposed constraints: Huebler includes a number of 'tells' to alert his viewers to the fact that the official claims for his practice are not to be taken at face value. As an example of this strategy, Hughes pays particular attention to Huebler's *Variable Piece #105, London, 1972*. This purports to pair photographs of eighteen mannequins taken at two-minute intervals on Oxford Street in London, with a photograph of the next passerby of the same sex as the mannequin that Huebler encountered. In Hughes' account, this piece is a key example of Huebler's attempts simultaneously to negate both the text-based systems that appear to structure a number of systems-based photographic practices, including his own, and the egregious expressivity of contemporaneous New York school photographers. This is why Huebler employs photographic *portraiture* in the context of his ostentatiously leaky systems. The fact that Huebler contravenes his own constraints to pair mannequins with look-alikes negates the former, while the use of look-alikes itself raises the spectre, but only the spectre, of the surrealists' use of doubles to tap into the Marvellous. Huebler's work consistently drains such motifs of their once uncanny affects, which, Hughes argues, should be seen as a riposte to the use of such motifs by various New York school photographers, including Diane Arbus and Helen Levitt, in their attempt to reinvigorate the expressivity of photographic portraiture.

Luke Skrebowski's chapter, 'Productive Misunderstandings: Interpreting Mel Bochner's Theory of Photography', also focuses primarily on a single photographic work by a conceptual artist: Bochner's self-reflexive examination of photography in *Misunderstandings (A Theory of Photography)* (1967–70), a series of photographs on index cards of hand-written fallacies about the nature of photography. Like several other contributors to this volume, Skrebowski takes aim at Wall's partisan history of photo-conceptualism, particularly his use of this history to legitimate a practice of photographic tableaux, the terms of which his own practice may then be seen to fulfil. Despite appearing to fulfil Duchamp's hope that photography would render painting 'despicable', the most prominent outcome of photography's success turns out to be, ironically, the emergence of photography as a bona fide mainstream fine art medium through which to reinvigorate the Western tradition of picture-making. Skrebowski understands the implications of Bochner's work to be a thoroughgoing critique of such picture-making *avant la lettre*, which he argues is premised on a partial and highly motivated reading of conceptual art's 'failure' to undermine the ability of canonical artistic media to function as ontological guarantors of their works' existence as art. By re-conceiving photography as information, Skrebowski argues, Bochner sought to undermine or at least place *en abyme*, by means of a complex sequence of iterations, inversions, and partial fabrications, the iconic indexicality widely taken to be photography's irreducible, medium-specific characteristic. That is, the apparent necessity that photographs are always, and only, depictions of whatever was before the camera at the moment of exposure, and as such occupies the correct causal relation to the resulting image.

Moreover, much like Hughes's reading of *Variable Piece #105, London, 1972*, Skrebowski's account of Bochner's *Misunderstandings* includes a number of 'tells'. These include Bochner's admission that the series contains a number of invented fallacies and a lone picture card that seems to show an impossible image, a negative of a Polaroid, a negative-less positive process. Such clues, particularly the latter, caution us against taking what the work appears to document at face value, and in doing so reveal Bochner's theoretical hand. Taken together with his photographic work more generally, *Misunderstandings* thus functions as a self-reflexive interrogation of photographic ontology that refuses to reduce photography to its depictive function. As such, Bochner's photography constitutes both a neglected moment in photo-conceptualism, and an anticipation of more recent, post-digital worries about the ontology of the photographic image.

One of several obvious tensions that animate the chapters in this volume can be highlighted by the juxtaposition of Skrebowski's defence of the aims of a radical conceptual critique of the aesthetic and Mark Godfrey's close reading of Roni's Horn's series of photographic books which she has been publishing since 1990. The photographs in *To Place* (1990–2006) document particular geographic, architectural, and cultural features of Iceland's landscape, while suggesting a range of possible relationships between photography, drawing and object making, as well as between various photographic genres. In his chapter, 'Roni Horn's Icelandic Encyclopedia', Godfrey contextualizes this project in relation to the history of post-conceptual photographic practices and artists' books, arguing that Horn uses the form of the archive and encyclopedia to undo rather than cement categories and definitions. In this respect at least, her project resembles Huebler's systematic undoing of systems.

Iceland has a paradoxical attraction for Horn: it is a place of Deleuzian 'becoming', whose geological identity is mutable, while at the same time, it is a landscape which allows her to feel centred. These two meanings are communicated through the ways in which the photographs are presented to the viewer/reader of the books that make up *To Place*. The books and the photographs within them suggest the paradoxical possibility of a kind of identity as a perpetual state of becoming firmly rooted in and by the world. This is perhaps best realized in the sixth volume of *To Place, Haraldsdóttir* (1996) which consists of series of photographs of Margrét, a young woman that Horn photographed immersed up to her neck in pools of water. The changing light, weather, and water temperature are reflected in the close-up portraits – explaining the name of the installation version of the series, *You are the Weather*. In this piece, portraiture is captured in the process of becoming landscape. In sum, Horn uses various aspects of post-conceptual photography (seriality, archiving, text/image relationships, the book form) to quite different ends to those of either Bochner *or* Wall. Since her work is neither a critique of pictorial aesthetics, à la Bochner, nor straightforwardly an extension of the pictorial tradition, à la Wall, it effectively problematizes some of the oppositions that structure the field this volume addresses.

The final three chapters in the volume focus on more obviously pictorial photography. In her chapter, 'Thomas Demand, Jeff Wall and Sherrie Levine: Deforming "Pictures"', Tamara Trodd focuses on photography's absorption of other media. Taking inspiration, like Godfrey, from Deleuze – in this case, the notion of the 'body without organs' – Trodd understands the recent return to pictorial photography by way of an analogy with the body. If composition can be

understood metaphorically in bodily terms, then Wall's compositions may be seen as deformed and twisted bodies, since his photographs are often made up of the disjointed remnants of past pictures that his work cannibalizes. This reading is clearly aimed against both Wall's claims for his own work and the use to which Fried has put them to claim his work for a revitalized modernist aesthetics of the picture. Trodd characterizes this 'force' of pictorial deformation she takes to be operative in both Wall and Demand, and the reanimation of dead pictorial remnants on which it turns in Wall, as 'uncanny'. This serves to pitch her account directly, if unintentionally, against Hughes' call for a moratorium on the use of this term in critical writing on photography. One obvious test of who is right here will turn on whether Trodd's reading of Wall and Demand manages to imbue this notion with critical life and productivity once more.

Fried is similarly the target of Trodd's reading of Demand, whose work she characterizes – against Fried's interpretation of it as allegory of 'intendedness as such' – as 'visceral'. Trodd understands Demand's pictures, with their painstakingly crafted but lifeless cardboard structures, not merely in terms of a sealed space interior to the photograph, but in terms of the *body*'s visceral interior, which extends, in Demand's exhibition designs, to the entire space of the gallery, and the relation between different works within his oeuvre. On Trodd's reading, this culminates in an account of how Demand's photography is 'propped', intermedially, on the body of sculpture ingested by photography. Photography, so construed, is a 'body without organs' – that is, without internal, self-supporting, organization – in so far as it is internally dependent on something external, namely, sculpture. The partial analogy with Wall is that Demand's photographs feed off the body of sculpture in ways reminiscent of Wall's relation to the corpus of past painting. What is 'uncanny' in all this, according to Trodd, is that it serves to reanimate the remnants of the medium upon which Demand's photography feeds, rather than creating a new medium in pictorial photography. In this respect, Trodd sees Demand as much as an inheritor of Sherrie Levine's strategies of appropriation as of Wall's relation to other media. On the resulting account, neither Wall nor Demand can be used to support the terms of a reinvigorated modernist aesthetics.

Not surprisingly, given our starting point, and the immense influence of his work and criticism on recent debates about photography, the final two chapters engage directly with the work of Jeff Wall. Wolfgang Brückle's chapter asks why Wall is held in such high esteem by art historians, having been championed early on by T. J. Clark and Thomas Crow in response to Wall's claim to fulfil Baudelaire's call for a 'painting of modern life', albeit in photographic form, and more recently by Michael Fried, who has picked up on Wall's penchant for self-consciously absorptive tableaux. In 'Almost Merovingian: On Jeff Wall's Relation to Nearly Everything', Brückle argues that such esteem is partly a result of the way in which Wall's writing self-consciously positions his own work in relation to both art history in general, and the theories of specific art historians in particular, and partly a result of the way in which his work self-consciously integrates and cross-breeds a vast array of art-historical sources and genres from both the post-Renaissance Western pictorial tradition and the straight tradition in twentieth-century photography, which Wall has been increasingly ready to admit into his overall oeuvre.

Of the two, it is the latter case on which Brückle focuses here. The argument is supported by Wall's strategic amendments to his own back-catalogue, his gestures of inclusion and exclusion and reworkings of past works in ways that are designed, in part with an art historian's eye to context formation and value creation, to shape the reception of his own work. In this context, Brückle focuses on Wall's reworking of a single image from *Landscape Manual* (1969), one of his earliest conceptual works, which pre-dates his official *catalogue raisonné*, as *After 'Landscape Manual'* (1969–2003), a banal stand-alone black and white image. This serves as Brückle's key to understanding the 'integrative drive' of Wall's work. Contra Trodd, far from being pictorially 'deforming', even such basic divisions as 'cinematographic' and 'documentary' are integrated as so many stylistic and genre resources within his overall practice. Thus, unlike many writers on Wall, Brückle understands Wall's project as fundamentally *synthetic*: far from creating individual tableaux, as is often claimed, individual works only gain their full meaning from his increasingly complex and self-referential corpus as a whole.

In this respect, Wall's practice might be thought to mirror Gerhard Richter's: just as Richter's colour charts or photo-paintings only take on their full significance in relation to his overall practice of painting, so individual black and white 'documentary' images or 'cinematographic' light-box tableaux only take on their full significance in relation to Wall's oeuvre as a whole. Unlike Richter, however, Wall's integrative drive brings together his works' range of genres, tropes, models and media sources in the service of a certain vision of realism. In this respect, Wall inherits Walker Evans's notion of 'documentary *style*'; that is, a conception of documentary according to which the documentary no longer picks out a non-artistic journalistic function but a problem of artistic style. In doing so, Brückle claims, Wall's greatest achievement is to have conferred upon photographic art something like the gravity of the canonical arts' relation to their own histories. For all their differences, then, Brückle and Trodd concur in contesting Fried's appropriation of Wall as an inheritor 'across a jagged breach' of the project of modernist painting.

Christine Conley's chapter, '*Morning Cleaning*: Jeff Wall and the *Large Glass*', likewise takes aim at Fried's appropriation of Wall, in this case by contesting head-on his reading of a specific work, *Morning Cleaning, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona* (1999). Contra Fried, for whom this absorptive tableaux exemplifies Wall's renewal of the anti-theatrical aims of high modernist painting, Conley takes Marcel Duchamp's *Large Glass* as the model for its structuring tensions, which prevent any 'intercourse' between the animate/inanimate, male/female figures, between Alejandro, the window cleaner, and Georg Kolbe's sculpture of a female nude, *Dawn*. While acknowledging the work's absorptive motifs, Conley takes issue with Fried's gender-neutral analysis, bringing out with considerable ingenuity a number of formal and iconographic parallels between *Morning Cleaning* and the *Large Glass*, – from Mies's cruciform column and Duchamp's horizontal division of the glass, through the window cleaner's squeegee and the chocolate grinder's bayonet, to the gender division and thematics of liquids in both.

Rather than simply projecting Duchamp's allegory of frustrated desire wholesale onto *Morning Cleaning*, however, Conley reads it as a 'Duchampian delay' within the historical context of the (reconstructed) German pavilion designed by Mies van der Rohe for the 1929 International Exposition in Barcelona. Mies's original building is known largely through thirteen master prints known as

Berliner Bild-Bericht photos. A temporary structure dismantled after only seven months, on the eve of National Socialism, it has long been regarded as encapsulating the defeated utopian aspirations of the avant-garde; its reconstruction as museum-cum-tourist attraction further hollows out whatever utopian social hopes it might once have embodied. By bringing this context to bear, her chapter opens onto a reading of *Morning Cleaning* beyond Duchamp's tale of arrested sexual desire, pointing allegorically to the frustrated dreams of the avant-garde to engage meaningfully with the working class. This is a central tenet of both Wall's critique of conceptual art, and his interpretation of Dan Graham's *Alteration to a Suburban House* (1978), which Wall reads as 'counter-memorial' to the defeatism of conceptual art's critique of art, and which Conley takes as the background context for *Morning Cleaning*. By bringing such a wealth of reference and intertextuality to her interpretation of the work, in its relation to Wall's other works and writings, Conley's chapter implicitly bears out Brückle's claims for the rich interdependence of Wall's corpus, while flagging a range of meanings with respect to class and gender for which there is no place in Fried's account of it as a marriage of absorptive tableaux with the aspirations of high modernist painting.

This overview cannot do full justice to the nuanced accounts of particular works and theorists that mark many chapters in this volume. It does, however, indicate the extent to which art history becomes closely entwined with criticism in many of them. Throughout, one finds an interleaving of traditional art-historical, philosophical and historical contextualizing of the object, with a more first person, visual, sometimes partisan, engagement with it. This is in large part owing to the relatively recent historical focus of the chapters collected in this book and the different protocols and conventions of art history 'proper' and criticism: where one demands an objective, detached or non-judgemental discourse, the other calls for a form of writing that is evocative and sometimes metaphorical, and includes the aesthetic, emotional and critical responses of the viewer. Where one is historical and interpretative, the other has both descriptive and normative dimensions, entailing that one take a stand on the value of the art in question. The interpenetration of these modes of writing about art reflects the permeability of contemporary art theory to philosophical and theoretical issues at large in the culture more generally and, in so far as artists are equally open to these same cultural forces, this explains the responsiveness of ambitious art to critical theorization. The intertwining of such forms of writing characterizes what the editors would claim to be a feature of the best contemporary writing about art.

Another feature of the collection as a whole is the extent to which the claims of individual chapters hold clear implications for the arguments of others. This is so probably because two issues in particular structure the argument of many of the chapters, in part no doubt as a response to our original call for chapters: Wall's history of photo-conceptualism and the implications of his practice, and Fried's critical positioning of recent photographic practice as an inheritance of the absorptive pictorial tradition and the aims of high modernist painting. Enough has been said already about the Wall essay, but the terms of Fried's argument may need to be spelt out more clearly here.

Even when it is not explicit, it should be clear by now that Fried's recent articles and book on photography served for many of the authors represented here

as a provocation and a challenge. Fried's claim, in brief, is that photography matters as art as never before because it has become the medium that raises the question of its own status as art most acutely. This, the argument runs, is because photography's mechanically produced (and reproduced) character – notably the causal, optical-chemical mechanisms underlying its indexicality – conspire to make the photograph resemble an object as much as, if not more than, a picture. In Fried's terms, this is an 'ontological' worry about photography per se, rather than a merely contingent worry about certain photographs, which arises as a result of the way in which photographs as a kind of image come into existence. As such, objecthood is a risk posed internally by the causal substrate of the photographic process that photographic artists must neutralize so as to secure their photographs' existence as art. As will be apparent to those who know Fried's criticism well, the photographers in Fried's canon now occupy a position vis-à-vis the threat of objecthood that the work of Frank Stella and Anthony Caro occupied for him over forty years ago. The structure of the argument is similar – albeit with a greater stress on the dialectic between what Fried now calls 'to be seenness' (rather than theatricality) and 'absorption' *internal to* the works held to triumph over objecthood; it is the artists and the medium in which they work that have changed. This has much to do with the significance of Wall for Fried's canon, given the negotiation between cinematographic and documentary (the tropes of the 'staged' and the 'straight') throughout Wall's oeuvre, and the foregrounding of his work's artefactuality – its status as an object in the world among other objects – by means of his light-box constructions, given their substantial projection from the wall.

Much like minimalism, then, photography precipitates a crisis of the picture and thereby places a particular burden on the photographic artist to establish their photographs' credentials as pictures, and ultimately as art, rather than mere objects. The artists selected by Fried are thus seen to deploy various strategies for establishing their work's existence as art, many of which involve procedures quite alien to the sort of digital manipulation sometimes likened to painting with pixels. Think, for example, of Thomas Demand's idiosyncratic practice of building models of paper and cardboard to photograph, rather than photographing what his models represent directly. This is interpreted as establishing a thoroughgoing intentionality – in Fried's words, a Demand photograph is 'a wholly intended object'. Without some sign of this assurance, the photograph, much like the 'literalist' object according to 'Art and Objecthood', makes no particular demands upon viewers, who are thereby given free rein to substitute their subjective experience of the work for the meaning intended by the artist. The work, as Fried paraphrased Donald Judd, need only be 'interesting'.

In the heat that will no doubt be generated by Fried's claim to see in recent art photography a renewal or inheritance of the project of high modernist painting, what is likely to pass unnoticed is that Fried's argument, *like that of his critics*, implicitly rests on some widely accepted, but highly contentious, assumptions about the relation between causality and intentionality in photography. What would need to be established, to get Fried's claim about photography's distinctive *internal* relation to objecthood off the ground, is that a photographer's use of the causal mechanisms at his or her disposal is different *in kind* to, say, a painter's use of the mechanisms at his or hers. But why think that? Take, for example, gravity's effects on oil as opposed to acrylic when allowed to run off an unprimed vertical

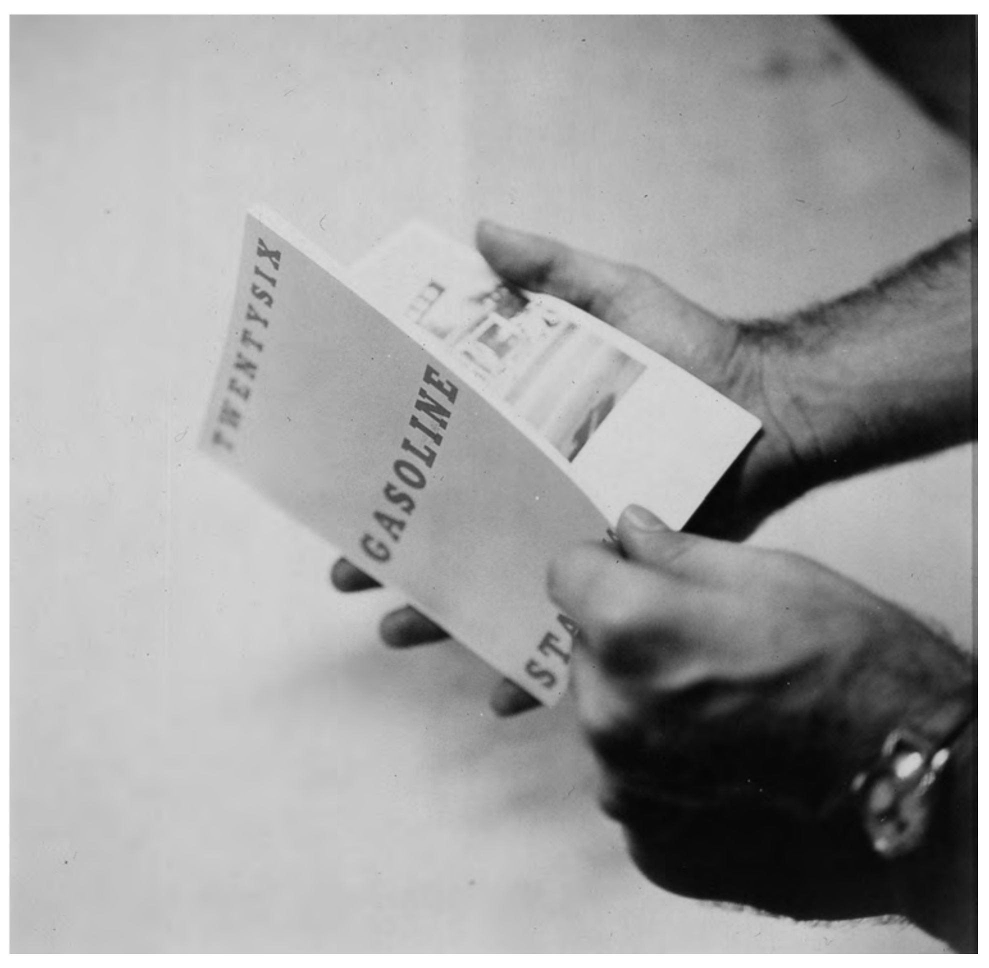
canvas, or the viscosity of a particular thinner combined with the properties of a particular means of application and the weave of a particular canvas, given its particular absorptive properties. The skilful painter (think of Morris Louis) manipulates all these *causal* interactions in the service of his or her ends. As Joel Snyder has consistently argued, there is no principled difference between photography and any other medium in this regard: the photographer employs a particular camera, lens, aperture and shutter speed, and sets all manner of other variables, including lighting, filters, and (in principle) choice and temperature of processing and developing solutions in the service of their particular ends. Being a skilled practitioner is being able to employ or, better, *act through* such means to achieve the end envisaged. The critic who claimed that, because the transfer of paint from brush to canvas in Titian or Velásquez is governed by causal laws the result cannot be art, would sound foolish indeed. The interesting question is why we seem so tempted to entertain what, prima facie, look like analogous claims about photography: wouldn't it be akin to saying that, given all the mechanical operations of a piano in the causal chain between depressing the keys and generating the resulting sounds, there is no such thing as the art of piano playing?

In sum: the use of digital technologies by Wall, or of models by Demand, may have foregrounded the intentional activity of photographers, but it was always there. Though it is *possible* for a photograph to be produced entirely by accident (a curtain blown by the wind knocks over a Polaroid camera and trips the shutter) or entirely naturally (the impression of a static lace curtain on a patch of wall faded by the sun is arguably a cameraless, agentless photograph), the use of the photographic apparatus by artists and photographers has always been saturated by intention. This does not, however, conflict with the fact that many artists, including photographers, delight in harnessing chance effects and making accidents happen. Though it falls beyond the scope of this introduction to deal with this in detail, what is striking here is the degree to which art history and photography theory share several of the foundational, but arguably contentious, assumptions of the philosophy of photography when it comes to understanding photography's nature as a mode of picture-making. It would take more space than is available to us here to establish this, so we will simply note that it is one of the aims of the broader research project of which this volume forms a part to interrogate such issues with the resources that art history and philosophy offer when brought into dialogue.

Despite the obvious impact of Fried's interventions, none of the chapters collected here follows him in claiming that the most ambitious recent photographic art is such because it asserts its own status as art in ways that renew the anti-theatrical aims of high modernist painting. Yet neither, it should be noted, do they accept the countervailing postmodern perception of photography as the anti-aesthetic medium par excellence, in virtue of its mechanical nature and causal basis. Rather, several seek out the deeper aesthetic dimension of works that might at first blush seem to negate aesthetic engagement. One way in which they do this is by positioning the work concerned in relation to a longer historical lineage or a wider cultural field. It is probably significant that, where the work of the presiding genius of the anti-aesthetic gesture is invoked, Duchamp is represented, not by the readymade, but by his elaborate *Large Glass*. The implication would seem to be that work not included in Fried's cannon does not occupy some *terrain vague* of objecthood, but forms part of alternative traditions.

As such, the chapters collected here suggest that photography after conceptual art may present broader implications for the larger field of art history and criticism. Conceptual art and its theoretical framing would at one time have been construed as announcing the demise of the privilege, if not the bare sensory necessity, of the aesthetic reception of works of art, in so far as the locus of the work was deemed to be the idea or statement. As a consequence, the photographs and texts associated with conceptual art have not always been looked at as carefully as they might. At least on the evidence of the chapters presented here, this perception of the art of the period and its legacy is no longer ascendant. At the same time, however, another conclusion to be drawn from this collection is that it no longer seems essential to the work of criticism to operate with a strong notion of medium. Rather, the chapters explore what we have termed the hybrid condition of art since the 1960s. If, for Fried, all art worthy of the name is the product of an intention to extricate the work from its entanglement in everyday contingency and indeterminacy, then this might be taken to imply that the critical task is one of specifying the medium. Fried and Rosalind Krauss seem to concur on this point, even if Krauss proposes a more limited application of the notion to the work of individual artists, such as James Coleman's adoption of the slide show as his 'medium'. In Krauss's usage, by contrast, the alternative risk of overstating the capacity of individual artists to invent media *ex nihilo* — and thereby undermining the possibility of a work counting as *an instance* of what is by nature a publicly shareable category, by depriving that notion of its publicity, is pushed to the fore. Be that as it may, what seems to be contested in many of the chapters in this book is the residual emphasis on the medium in both Fried and Krauss. None of the authors represented here seems particularly exercised about disciplinary boundaries or medium specificity: photography mingles freely with graphic art, text, sculpture, painting, performance and so on. Even so, Fried's argument will not go away because now, as in 1967, he has touched on the nerve that runs through the art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, namely, that a great deal of the art of the period constitutes itself as such precisely by calling into question artistic autonomy, authorial agency, medium specificity and its conventions. Ironically, ruling out such work as art worthy of serious consideration turns out to have been just the provocation required to motivate the most sustained criticism of that very work.

Acknowledgements
The editors of this volume gratefully acknowledge the support of the AHRC, who funded the three-year 'Aesthetics after Photography' research project from which this volume arises. We would also like to thank: the individual authors for their good humoured and timely responses to our numerous requests for clarifications, rewrites and the like; Dawn Phillips and Wolfgang Brückle, our two research fellows on the AHRC project, for their expertise and unflagging input more generally; David Peters Corbett and Sam Bibby at *Art History* for their invaluable editorial assistance and advice; Julian Stallabrass for his perceptive comments on the drafts; and Marko Daniel, Madeleine Keep and Victoria Walsh at Tate for their support and first class organization at the 2008 AAH from which the majority of these chapters originally derive.



1 Ed Ruscha, *Hands Flipping Pages (Twentysix Gasoline Stations)*, 1963. Gelatin silver print, 25.1 × 25.1 cm. Photo: © Ed Ruscha. Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery.

Photography after Conceptual Art Edited by Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen
 ISBN: 978-1-444-33360-2

2

AUTO-MATICITY: RUSCHA AND PERFORMATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

MARGARET IVERSEN

Ed Ruscha's books are puzzling. While his paintings find a plausible interpretative context in the work of Jasper Johns and Pop Art, his books are more often viewed as proto-photo-conceptual. Ruscha's response to these attempts at categorization has been to distance himself from both pop and conceptual art, but he has always acknowledged the importance of the work of Marcel Duchamp, especially in relation to the books. He has in fact declared that 'the spirit of Duchamp's work is stronger in my books than in anything else'.[1] He knew Duchamp's work in reproduction from his high school days, and in 1963 he was able to see the work and meet the man in person at the first major Duchamp retrospective held at the Pasadena Art Museum.[2] It is his reception of Duchamp that makes Ruscha's work proto-conceptual. But exactly which Duchamp was important for him? Certainly not the 'appropriationist' Duchamp that resurfaced in a certain strand of critical conceptual art and later issued in the work of Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine or Richard Prince; or the Duchamp as founder of institutional critique, carried forward by artists such as Daniel Buren or Hans Haacke. Ruscha's hard-edged style of painting may look back to Duchamp's intense precision-painting in, for example, the *Chocolate Grinder (No.1) of 1913*, but the books seem related to the reception of another Duchamp in the United States which might be called the instructional and performative Duchamp. This is the legacy most avidly developed by the experimental composer, John Cage, and the group of artists influenced by him who in 1962 were to become Fluxus. Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Morris are often cited as the most important inheritors of this tradition, but, I will argue, Ruscha should be added to this list.

Ruscha's books are frequently, and rightly, described as 'cool', yet the artist declared, in an interview of 1989, that they were 'hot – almost too hot to handle' and, also, 'powerful statements, maybe the most powerful things I've done'.[3] They were as cool in conception and as hotly subversive as Duchamp's readymades. Yet rather than following the logic of the readymade, they put into operation another strategy inaugurated by Duchamp's *3 Standard Stoppages* (1913–14). Ruscha once remarked that Duchamp had exhausted or 'killed' the idea of displaying an ordinary object as art, so the books staked out a different, although related, strategy – one that was arguably more radical since they were circulated without the support of the framing gallery system.[4]

A recent book about the pre-history of conceptual art by Liz Kotz, *Words to be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (2007), is very helpful in making the link between conceptual art and earlier performance-based pieces which were governed by a notational system or 'score'. Particularly helpful in this context is the chapter called 'Language between Performance and Photography', where Kotz argues that the stress that conceptual artists put on language had its roots in a practice in which a verbal score or set of instructions was performed. When this strategy is annexed to photography, she writes, 'such notational systems dislocate photography from the *reproductive logic* of original and copy to reposition it as a *recording mechanism* for specific realizations of general schemata'. Kotz is concerned to point out how this brings the execution of a work closer to an utterance in language: 'The work of art has been re-configured as a specific realization of a general proposition.'[5] What she means by this is that the score or instruction governs the individual utterance or performance. The analogy Kotz makes here between the pair of terms 'instruction or score and performance' and 'linguistic system and individual utterance' is imprecise, but at least it serves the purpose of relating this type of work to the legacy of structural linguistics and its critique of authorship. However, Kotz's linguistic emphasis does not adequately bring out the open-ended, experimental character of the work. In my view, the brilliance, for instance, of Lawrence Weiner's *Statements* published as a little volume 1968, one of which reads, 'A 36″ × 36″ removal to the lathing or support wall of plaster or wall board from a wall', is the unpredictable pattern of struts, pipes and wires that are exposed when the minimal instruction is *performed* – although, admittedly, this rather goes against the grain of his own *Statement of Intent* (1969): 'The piece need not be built.' This example demonstrates clearly the combination of terse verbal instruction, performance, and openness to chance that characterizes much of the work of this period. The way the instruction is often instantiated with a simple square removal of plasterboard also puts the work in touch with the sort of photography that simply frames something that might otherwise go unobserved.

Of course, Ruscha's early books pre-date the *Statements* by several years, so a context for understanding their invention has to be sought earlier. Apart from Duchamp's famous 'instructional piece', about which more later, work that might have formed the background to Ruscha's highly original books is that done by a group of artists influenced by John Cage and later associated with Fluxus. The minimal verbal instructions or 'event scores' for performance pieces by George Brecht, for example, were presented on cards in precise graphic form. The Fluxus composer, Lamonte Young, whose *Composition 1960 #10* was dedicated to Robert Morris, consists of the instruction, 'Draw a straight line and follow it'. The instruction is simple yet open to any number of realizations. In 1961, Morris and Young collaborated on a performance of this piece in which they laboriously traced and retraced a line on stage twenty-nine times. Kotz notes that such pieces have the effect of bringing something to our attention by framing or pointing to it, especially things that are in danger of disappearing 'back into the quotidian'.[6] In this respect, they resemble readymades which had a habit of disappearing. Despite suggestive similarities, the relative obscurity of this proto-Fluxus activity in the early 1960s suggests that we should treat it as an illumi-



2 Ed Ruscha, '*Union*, Needles, California, 1962', from *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, 1963. Image 12.4 × 26.7 cm. Photo: © Ed Ruscha. Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery.

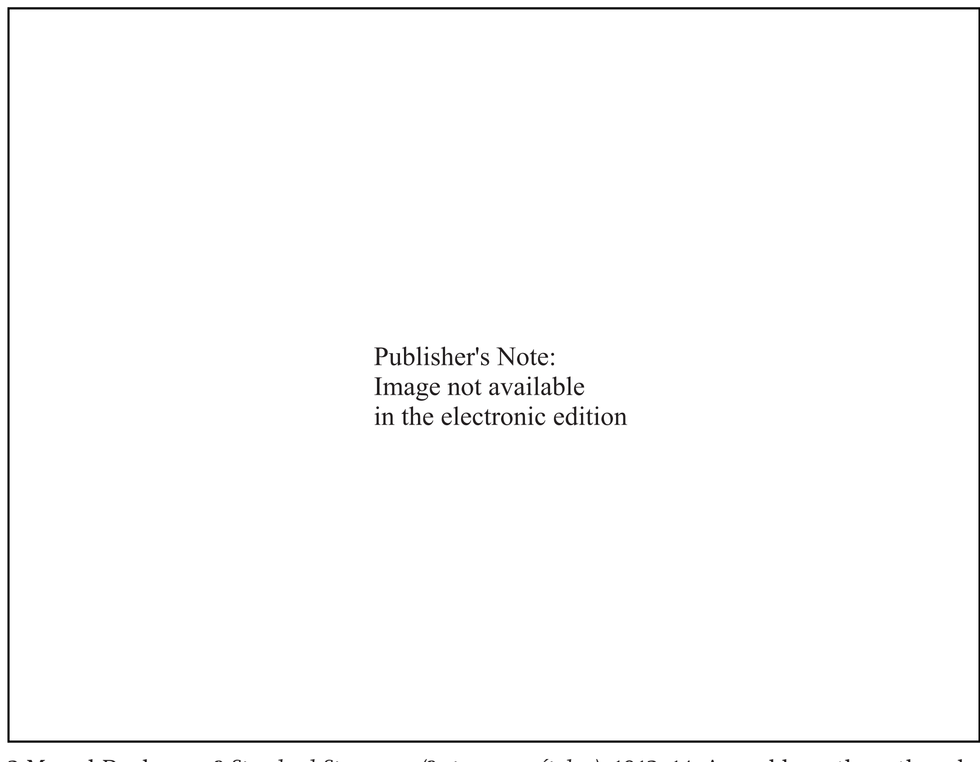
nating parallel development rather than as an actual precedent for Ruscha's books.[7]

The way that the Fluxus 'event scores' and performances frame or point to something in the world throws light on Ruscha's 'performative' use of photography in his books. Performative photography begins with an instruction or rule which is followed through with a performance. The use of the term 'performative' in this context is meant to invoke the difference between performance and performativity. Making use of Jacques Derrida's critique of J. L. Austin's theory of 'performative utterances' in *How to do Things with Words*, Peggy Phelan defines a 'performance' as a unique and spontaneous event in the present tense that cannot be repeated or adequately captured on film or video.[8] This radical notion of performance lies behind the hostility of some performance, site-specific and land artists to photo-documentation. 'Performativity', in contrast, signals an awareness of the way the present gesture is always an iteration or repetition of preceding acts. It therefore points to the collective dimension of speech and action. Of course, Derrida would object that there is no such thing as a 'performance' that is not a repetition, since 'iterability is a structural characteristic of every mark'.[9] For him, it is impossible to distinguish between citational statements on the one hand, and singular, original statements on the other. This is because an intention to say or do anything can never be entirely present to itself; there is always at work what he calls a 'structural unconscious'.[10] The distinction is nonetheless useful for thinking about different art practices and the aims associated with them. The term 'performative' is often used in critical writing in a less precise way to mean work with an element of performance, but I would like to see it reserved for the work of those artists who are interested in displacing spontaneity, self-expression and immediacy by putting into play repetition and the inherently iterative character of the instruction. The photographic practice I have in mind is also performative in the sense that the instruction makes something happen rather than describing a given state of affairs. Performative

photography involves the partial abdication of authorial control, in favour of accident, chance or unforeseen circumstances. It is no wonder, then, that many of the artists interested in this kind of photography, like Vito Acconci, soon turned to video.

All this seems to me highly pertinent to the case of Ruscha's books. His groundbreaking book of 1963, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, consists of photographs of gas stations along Route 66 between Los Angles and Oklahoma City (plate 2). The route is a relatively straight line on a map that he followed in his car.[11] Ruscha set himself a simple brief – to photograph the gas stations *en route* – and he understood the photographs as records of these large-scale readymades. Depersonalization, both in the pre-set project and the uninflected snapshots, overlays what is, in fact, a record of anti-landmarks or poor monuments along the route home. Particularly pertinent in this context is Ruscha's comment that he thought of the title first. In an interview with John Coplans for *Artforum* in 1965, he remarked that the work began as 'a play on words': he liked the word 'gasoline' and the specific quantity 'twenty-six'.[12] The design for the cover was finished before a single photograph was taken. Given the title's priority, it can readily be understood as a contracted form of an instruction: 'record 26 gasoline stations along Route 66'.

An early precedent for 'instructional' works of art is Duchamp's important *3 Standard Stoppages* of 1913–14 which consists of three gently curving threads, each one affixed to a panel, and three wooden templates or rulers formed in accordance with these wavy lines (plate 3). Like *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, the title of Duchamp's work has the same random specificity of a number followed by a qualifier and plural noun. If the similarity of the titles seems a tenuous link, it can be made more robust by pointing to a collage Ruscha made in 1960, called *Three Standard Envelopes* – clearly intended as a homage to Duchamp, although it actually resembles a Rauschenberg more. Furthermore, Duchamp's work is framed by an instruction and cannot be properly understood without it. Unlike Ruscha's contracted instructions, however, it is a rather elaborate one from the box of notes for the year 1913: '– If a straight horizontal thread one meter long falls from a height of one meter onto a horizontal plane distorting itself *as it pleases* and creates a new shape of the unit of length. – 3 patterns obtained in more of less similar conditions: *considered in relation to one another* they are an *approximate reconstitution* of a measure of length.'[13] The comparison with Duchamp's *Stoppages* highlights the mock-experimental character of Ruscha's books. The instruction dictates the initial conditions of the experiment, but it does not determine the outcome. On the contrary, the instruction is a device for evading authorial or artistic agency and generating chance operations and unanticipated outcomes – the work thus displays what Duchamp called in his notes, 'canned chance'.[14] Duchamp's little experiment did not involve photography, but he was fully aware of the significance of the camera as an apparatus apparently designed to generate chance effects and unexpected outcomes. Although sophisticated cameras are designed to produce predictable pictures in the hands of a skilled photographer, the automaticity or mechanical nature of the process lends itself to unintended happy (or unhappy) accidents. As Walker Evans so eloquently put it, the camera excels at 'reflecting swift chance, disarray, wonder, and experiment'.[15] There is an intrinsic connection,



3 Marcel Duchamp, *3 Standard Stoppages (3 stoppages étalon)*, 1913–14. Assemblage: three threads glued to three painted canvas strips; three wood slates shaped along one edge to match the curves of the threads; the whole fitted into wood box. Replica, 1964. London: Tate Modern. Photo: © Tate, London 2009/DACS, London.

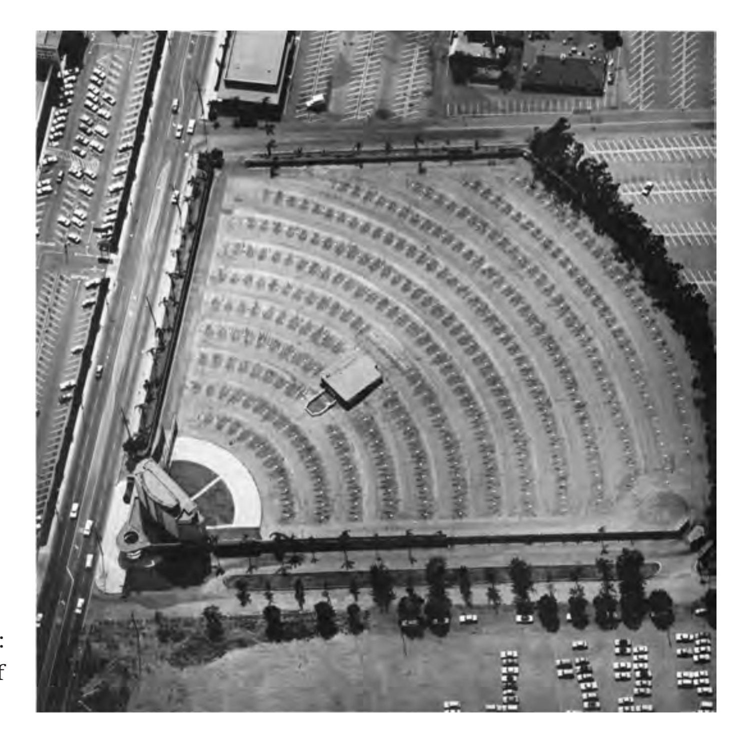
then, between the instructional means of short-circuiting authorial agency, of ensuring non-interference, and a certain use of the medium of photography.[16] Photography, or at least this particular snapshot use of photography, brings together authorial abnegation, indexicality and openness to chance. Ruscha refers at one point to its 'inhuman aspect', as it records without making qualitative judgments.[17]

It is because *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* has a rule-governed, performative, character that comparisons with Evans, Robert Frank and other photographers of American vernacular scenes are so unilluminating. Robert Frank's *The Americans* was published in 1959, only four year prior to *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, yet there is a world of difference between it and Ruscha's books. First, Ruscha largely excluded people and cars from his photographs; Frank's pictures are almost entirely made up of people and cars. Second, Frank directs our attention with pointed juxtapositions to the social inequalities that existed across America; Ruscha aims at neutral recording – just 'facts', as he puts it. Finally, judged by the standards set by Frank, Evans and other masters of the medium, Ruscha's snapshots are just pretty poor quality. But it is crucial to bear in mind that Ruscha was engaged in a radically different kind of artistic activity – that is, following a

predetermined route in his car and systematically recording just the gas stations. This pervasive auto-maticity (instruction, car, route, camera) is what makes the book something new and strange. Or perhaps not so new and strange – maybe something more like a hybrid of current American and early avant-garde French artistic trends. Consider Ruscha's response to one interviewer when asked about the influence of his sojourn in Paris. He said he didn't like Picasso as much as Apollinaire, Duchamp, Man Ray and Picabia.[18] The design of the book is also very French (see plate 1). It is white with red lettering wrapped in a protective glassine dust jacket. I imagine that when Ruscha visited Paris, he was struck by this spare, distinctively French, standard book design. He remarks, 'I was interested in small books and I travelled to Europe and saw books over there very unlike the ones here. I just like the feel of them.'[19] The emphasis Ruscha put on the typography and all-over graphic design of his covers, almost mini-concrete poems, distinguishes them from the Fluxus event score, which was not considered the locus of the work.

Although Ruscha's photographs, viewed individually and in isolation from their proper context in the books, may seem to mime the amateur, my argument implies that this is hardly an adequate account of the project of the books. In his well-known essay, '"Marks of Indifference": Aspects of Photography in or as Contemporary Art', Jeff Wall offers an interpretation of Ruscha's work as an imitation of amateur photography, in the same way as he regards Robert Smithson's use of photography as a parodic imitation of photo-journalism.[20] Positioning the photographic work of Ruscha, Smithson and Dan Graham, among others, in relation to these non-autonomous and un-aesthetic photographic practices helps to explain some of its character, but the operation of parodying has to do an awful lot of work. It does not quite capture Ruscha's characteristic affectless, depersonalized, uninflected, use of the camera. In my view, the photographs are better viewed as the outcome of a rule-governed performance. Ruscha describes his approach to the making of a book as a 'pre-meditated' 'self-assignment'.[21] One of the many interviewers who try to induce Rushca to talk about his 'vision' gets a typically deflating but significant reply: 'The attitude is just following through, following through with a feeling of blind faith that I had from the beginning. . . . The books were easy to do once I had a format. . . . Each one had to be plugged into the system I had.'[22] This is clearly not the language of an amateur 'everyman' or even a parodic version of one. It is rather the idiom of an artist who has discovered a new medium and is busy unfolding its implications in a particularly systematic way. As Kevin Hatch observes, although Ruscha's books may start with an idea, the work far exceeds the idea.[23]

The interpretation of Ruscha's books as the products of rule-governed performances was very briefly adumbrated by Rosalind Krauss in '"Specific" Objects', an essay from 2004 which formed a part of her project of re-thinking the idea of the medium. After proposing, half-jokingly, that the car might be considered the element that forms a link between all his books, she puts forward another idea of his medium when she draws attention, as I have done, to the priority of the book titles. She qoutes Ruscha: 'I had this idea for a book title – *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* – and it became like a fantasy rule in my mind that I had to follow.'[24] Krauss concludes, 'so for him *medium* has less to do with the physicality of the support than the system of "rules"'. Oddly, Krauss does not link this



4 Ed Ruscha, 'Gilmore Drive-in Theatre, 6201 W. 3rd St.', from *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles*, 1967. Photo: © Ed Ruscha. Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery.

medium with the long-standing artistic tradition of instructional-performative practices, but rather regards this arbitrary self-setting of rules as 'necessary once the artist finds himself cut free of tradition and wandering haplessly in a field where "anything goes"'.[25]

Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles, 1967, is a particularly good example of Ruscha's systematic strategy, even though the assignment is here delegated (plate 4). He gave an aerial photographer instructions to record empty parking lots around Los Angeles on a Sunday. The variety of abstract herring bone patterns is striking, but Ruscha said that what really pleased him was the way the experiment revealed unexpected traces of absent cars in the patterns of variegated oil stains. In an interview in 1972, he pointed out to David Bourdon how 'the largest and most saturated spots indicate which spaces are the most favoured and parked upon'.[26] This remark clearly indicates that the pictures are intended to be looked at – not exactly as aesthetic objects, but as documents conveying the results of his experiment. In all the books, aesthetic value is largely displaced onto their stylish typography, careful layout and tactile charm. The early books, including this one, are diminutive: only 7 × 51/2 inches. *Every Building on Sunset Strip* (1966), consisting of continuous motorized photos of both sides of the street printed on a twenty-five foot accordion-fold page, came housed in a box covered in reflective silver paper – miming the surface glamour of chrome. Ruscha is conscious that the books are as close as his work ever gets to existing in three dimensions, that is, as sculpture. Perhaps it is redundant to note here that I am not in agreement with interpretations of Ruscha's work that take him to be a latter-day Theodor Adorno investigating the mass-produced uniformity of our late capitalist age. His attention to the detail of the visible world and his evident



5 Ed Ruscha, Spread from *Royal Road Test*, 1967. Photo: © Ed Ruscha. Courtesy: Gagosian Gallery.

enjoyment of the Los Angeles landscape preclude such a view. Speaking of the city, he remarks, 'I love it. I still get lifeblood from this place.'[27] The banal character of the photographs is often remarked, but Ruscha's word for this distinctive quality is not banal but 'neutral'. For example, he says that people and cars are not neutral enough for his taste. This seems to suggest a Duchampian 'beauty of indifference' and perhaps also a sense that such loaded subjects would draw attention to themselves as depictions and thus destroy the aesthetic integrity of the books' overall design as objects. One critic put this point well, noting with regard to *Some Los Angeles Apartments* (1965), 'his primary concern was not how to look at an apartment building, but rather how to experience a book that contained snapshots of apartments.'[28]

The book that declares itself most obviously as an instance of instructional-performative photography is the collaborative project *Royal Road Test* of 1967 (plate 5). Its experimental character is signalled in the title and its content is also more obviously the record of a performance. Ruscha says that Mason Williams spontaneously threw a typewriter out of a speeding car window and only later did they decide to go back and record the wreckage, but the book is presented as a totally pre-meditated, performative, instructional piece. In fact, the first photograph in the book shows a Royal typewriter sitting quietly on a desktop.[29] The effect of the performance – the wreckage strewn across the Arizona desert – is carefully documented as if it were the scene of a crime. Many of the overhead shots resemble the Man Ray/Duchamp photograph *Dust Breeding* (in which, conversely,

the dusty horizontal *Large Glass* is made to look like a desert landscape). The fragments of an unrecognizable mechanical apparatus strewn across the landscape only reinforce this impression. The last photograph shows the shadows of the three 'bachelors' (identified generically as driver, thrower and photographer) pointing at the twisted body of the mechanical 'bride'.

A similar indexation of a performer just outside the frame occurs in *Nine Swimming Pools and a Broken Glass* (1968), where the photographed pools mirror palm trees, umbrellas and whole apartment blocks. In one, wet footprints leading to the diving board and ripples in the water indicate, like clues, the recent presence of a diver (plate 6). All of Ruscha's books, except of course *Every Building on Sunset Strip* (1966), have blank pages. There are aesthetic and practical reasons for this: he remarked that he wanted *Nine Swimming Pools* to have a certain weight and thickness and the cheapest layout of ten colour plates over sixty-four pages is what dictated the rhythm of photographs and blank pages. He also said that he could have added a few more photographs at no extra expense, but he liked the number nine.[30] In addition, the blank pages also serve to make one aware of the book as a physical object, not just a vehicle for photographs and text.

I like to think of *Nine Swimming Pools* as Ruscha's wry tribute to Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (1915–23), generally referred to as the *Large Glass*.[31] The pools, like the *Glass*, are both transparent and reflective, but it is the tenth incongruous photograph that hints at a link. The desire these glossy colour pictures of empty pools inspires is brought to an abrupt end by the final photograph of a broken glass – the fate that befell Duchamp's *Glass* in 1926 (plate 7). Ruscha's insistence on the number nine might then be plausibly explained as an oblique reference to the Nine Malic Moulds in the lower register of the *Glass* – the Moulds were, after all, conceived as variously shaped hollow forms.[32] Some of Ruscha's other works might be thought to refer to more recent precedents. *Various Small Fires and Milk* (1964) recalls a Fluxus event performed the same year by George Brecht in the Fluxhall/Fluxshop in New York City. The piece by La Monte Young, *Composition 1960 #2* ('Build a fire in front of the audience . . .'), as minimally performed by Brecht, involved lighting a book of matches. The sixth image in Ruscha's book is a flaming book of matches. Although my main point about Ruscha's photography is that the photographic act is crucially altered by its re-functioning as part of a performative exercise, many of the photographs in this book actually document mini-performances, particularly those that show that rare thing in any Ruscha work, people – here, a young woman smoking a cigarette and a man smoking a cigar. However, because of the heterogeneous and rather random nature of the small fires, the book does not have the satisfying rigour of *Gasoline Stations*, *Parking Lots* or *Pools*.

Brecht's work is particularly interesting in this context for several reasons. For a start, he obviously took great care with the graphic design of his 'event scores' on index cards. See, for example, his spare design for *Word Event* (Spring, 1961) which has a large bullet point centred on the card and then the word: • EXIT. The capitalization mimes the look of exit signs in public places in the USA, so performing the piece might be a matter of attending to that common sign with fresh eyes, either on the card or *in situ* or as a readymade sign offered for sale in Fluxus magazines. Another score, *Two Signs*, calls for a similar sustained attention



6 Ed Ruscha, Spread from *Nine Swimming Pools and a Broken Glass*, 1968 (pool). Photo: © Ed Ruscha. Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery.



7 Ed Ruscha, Spread from *Nine Swimming Pools and a Broken Glass*, 1968 (glass). Photo: © Ed Ruscha. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery.

to common signage: • Silence and • No Vacancy. Ruscha's early word paintings of appropriated brand names such as *Ace* or *Spam*, both of 1962, are made in a similar spirit. *Royal* as printed on the cover of *Royal Road Test*, reproduces the distinctive logotype of the brand name. These examples suggest both a graphic designer's appreciation of classic logotypes as well as a transgressive appropriation of pop culture.

The condition under which photography was acceptable as a medium for Ruscha, and for a number of other artists of this generation, was as a performative act executed in accordance with a set of instructions or simple brief. The photographs that result are the trace of the act and do not necessarily document a performance. Since the stress is on the photographic instantiation of an instruction (and not the instruction itself), they invite close inspection. In Rosalind Krauss's influential account of the index in art of the 1970s, the index is understood as a sub-symbolic mark or trace requiring a supplemental text to anchor the sign. As we have seen, Ruscha's photography reverses that relation. The text or title in Ruscha's practice is a general, fairly empty or abstract instruction, while the photographs represent specific instances or realization. The photographs, then, serve to anchor language in a concrete, particular reality. Margit Rowell comes close to saying this in her catalogue essay for *Ed Ruscha: Photographer*. She identifies the two key factors of his photography as 'the importance of the linguistic premise' and 'his personal interpretation of the ''found'' aesthetic'.[33] I would like to specify these two points a bit further. First, it is not just language that is important for him, but something more like found poetry conveyed in visually arresting typography and graphic design. And, second, the link that he makes between words and his found objects is performative.

Before finally concluding, I want to touch on the work of a few artists whose use of photography might also be described as instructional and performative. I have written elsewhere about the early photographic practice of Vito Acconci, who incidentally began his career as a concrete poet, and of Sophie Calle, but they deserve mentioning again in this context.[34] In his *Following Piece* (1969), Acconci set himself the task of following a randomly selected stranger walking in the street while he himself remained unobserved. The task ended when the person entered a private space. The performance was repeated every day for three weeks. Signalling the refusal of authorial control and corresponding receptivity, he called this activity 'Performing myself through another agent'.[35] The work is usually displayed with notes about the performance along with photographs, taken by a third party, of Acconci performing the work.

Ten years later, during the month of February 1979, the French artist Sophie Calle undertook her own following piece, *Suite vénitienne*. In some ways it resembles Acconci's except that here the camera is more integrated into the activity.[36] Calle decided to travel to Venice, track down a man she had met once at a party in Paris, and follow him. Because her choice of Henri B. was more or less arbitrary, her activity lacks the character of a stalking. Rather, Calle puts herself at the mercy of another.[37] Sounding very like a latter day André Breton, she says: '*I see myself at the labyrinth's gate, ready to get lost in the city and in this story. Submissive.*'[38] The book form of the work consists of her stolen snapshots of Henri B.'s movements about the city and her diary.

The Belgian artist based in Mexico, Francis Alÿs, did a series called *Dopplegänger* (2000) for which he devised the following instruction: 'When arriving in ... (new city), wander, looking for someone who could be you. If the meeting happens, walk beside your doppelgänger until your pace adjusts to his/hers.' Photographs of rather unlikely looking suspects, taken from behind, are displayed with the text specifying the city. Alÿs's video piece, *If you are a Typical Spectator what you are really doing is Waiting for an Accident to Happen* (1996), is also a sort of following piece. Alÿs trained his camera on an empty plastic bottle as it blew and was kicked by children around the great Zócalo square in Mexico City. The bottle strays into the street, Alÿs in hot pursuit, until ... bang, crash, the world turns upside down as he is hit by a car. Despite its manifest differences, this video has all the characteristics I've highlighted in Ruscha's books. It is a pre-meditated, instructional, performative video piece that involves following a rule, or a bottle, until the unexpected outcome – which in this case, turns out to be a Ruscha-like deflationary joke at the end.

What is the status of photography in these works? Can it be considered a medium at all? Ruscha has claimed more than once that he is not interested in photography as a medium, but by this I think he means that any attempt to position his books in the context of the history of photography is mistaken.[39] This is because the books are not to be viewed as books of photographs; rather, they are three-dimensional works of art designed to be handled as well as viewed. Ruscha tried to convey this point visually with photographs and drawings of the books being handled (plate 1). In 1972, he made a drawing in gunpowder and pastel called, *Three Hanging Books*, which shows the books suspended by threads in midair. This is probably yet another reference to Duchamp who suspended his readymades from the ceiling of his studio.[40] It is no wonder, then, that specialist theorists or historians of photography so often misunderstand the work. This includes Jeff Wall whose explanation of Ruscha's photographic practice, and of conceptual photography more generally, as miming non-autonomous uses of the medium, whether amateur or journalistic, is not satisfactory. First, it diminishes the way the work relates to early avant-garde movements such as Dada and surrealism (by reducing them in turn to anti-aesthetic gestures). In those movements, the camera was often used to document a found or ready-made object, like the famous photographs of the slipper spoon and metal mask featured in Breton's *L'Amour fou*. And they were often done in series, like the close-up photographs made by Brassaï, probably at Dalí's instructions, of 'involuntary sculptures', the results of automatic manipulation of, for example, a ticket stub in a pocket. Second, and also following Dada and surrealist precedents, the photographic work discussed here found an outlet not as free-standing works of art to be sold in a gallery, but more often in mass-produced magazines or books: Ruscha's books originally sold for around $3.00. Third, Wall's theory does not adequately take into account the instructional and performative dimensions of this photographic practice. The photography discussed here is 'conceptual' only in so far as it is the result of following a rule or instruction in the spirit of experimentation, not knowing the outcome in advance. It may follow a preconceived rule, but it is open to unpredictable outcomes when the instruction is carried out. None of these strategies strikes me as reductive or anaesthetic. Rather, the aesthetic is reformulated by these artists in ways that accommodate

different ideas of subjectivity, experience and art.[41] In sum, photography after conceptual art should be viewed as refiguring photography away from high modernist paradigms and toward a model which revives the spirit of the early avant-gardes.

Notes

1 Ed Ruscha, *Leave Any Information at the Signal: Writings, Interviews, Bits, Pages*, ed. and with an Introduction by Alexandra Schwartz, Cambridge, MA, 2003, 329.

2 The exhibition, *By or of Marcel Duchamp or Rrose Sélavy*, Pasadena Art Museum, October 1963, was curated by Walter Hopps, formerly of Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles. It is also relevant to point out that the first monograph on Duchamp by Robert Lebel was translated and published in 1959. Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp*, trans. George Heard Hamilton, New York, 1959.

3 Ruscha, *Leave*, 300.

4 Ruscha, *Leave*, 216.

5 Liz Kotz, 'Language between performance and photography', in Kotz, *Words to be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art*, Cambridge, MA, 2007, ch. 5, 194.

6 Kotz, *Words*, 89.

7 See Sylvia Wolf, *Ed Ruscha and Photography*, New York, Whitney Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004; *Ed Ruscha: Photographer*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 2006, with an essay by Margit Rowell; *Edward Ruscha: Editions, 1959–1999: Catalogue Raisonné* [catalogue and] essays by Siri Engberg and Clive Phillpot, Minneapolis, The Walker Art Center, 1999; *Ed Ruscha, The Works of Edward Ruscha*, essays by Dave Hickey and Peter Plagens, introduction by Anne Livet, with a foreword by Henry T. Hopkins, San Francisco Museum of Art, 1982; Neal Benezra, Kerry Brougher; with a contribution by Phyllis Rosenzweig, *Ed Ruscha*, Washington, DC, Hirschhorn Museum, 2000.

8 Peggy Phelan, 'Andy Warhol: performances of death in America', in *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, eds Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, London and New York, 1999, 223–37; and 'The ontology of performance: representation without reproduction', in Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, London and New York, 1993, 146–66. See also, J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (2nd edn), Cambridge, MA, 1975.

9 Jacques Derrida, 'Signature event context', *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago, IL, 1982, 324.

10 Derrida, 'Signature', 326.

11 The arrangement of the photos is, however, not linear at all, as Eleanor Antin long ago pointed out. Eleanor Antin, 'Reading Ruscha', *Art in America*, 61: 6, November-December 1977, 69–70.

12 Ruscha, *Leave*, 23.

13 The complete instruction can be found in Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, eds, *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, London, 1975, 22. See also Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors Even*, a typographic version by Richard Hamilton of Marcel Duchamp's *Green Box*, trans. George Heard Hamilton, New York, 1960.

14 One can well imagine Ruscha's admiring the phrase 'canned chance'. Brecht liked it so much he played on it in an installation called *Iced Dice*, at the Martin Jackson Gallery, New York.

15 Walker Evans, 'The reappearance of photography', in Alan Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays in Photography*, New Haven and London, 1980, 185. Evans' essay was originally published in 1931.

16 See Benjamin Buchloh's interview with Robert Morris for Morris's comments on his exactly contemporary attraction to the idea of instructional sculpture. Buchloh, 'Three conversations in 1985: Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol and Robert Morris', *October*, 70, Fall 1984, 33–54.

17 Ruscha, *Leave*, 170–1.

18 Ruscha, *Leave*, 120.

19 Ruscha, *Leave*, 216–17.

20 Jeff Wall, '"Marks of indifference": aspects of photography in, or as, conceptual art', in Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer, eds, *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and Cambridge, MA, 1996.

21 Ruscha, *Leave*, 44.

22 Ruscha, *Leave*, 212.

23 Kevin Hatch, '"Something else": Ed Ruscha's photography books', *October*, 111, Winter 2005, 124. The volume is devoted to essays on Ruscha.

24 Ruscha, *Leave*, 23.

25 Rosalind Krauss, '"Specific" objects', *Res*, 46, Autumn 2004, 222. She refers here to Stanley Cavell's concept of 'automatism'.

26 Ruscha, *Leave*, 43.

27 Ruscha, *Leave*, 123.

28 Richard D. Marshall, *Ed Ruscha*, London, 59.

29 Ruscha, explained this as follows: 'The photo of the intact typewriter was added after the original one was thrown from the car. The act of throwing the typewriter was spontaneous and we re-created the before photo by finding a duplicate typewriter' email correspondence 20 July 2009.

30 Ruscha, *Leave*, 44.

31 David Hockney's painting, *A Bigger Splash* (1967), may also be a relevant reference in this context as it depicts a pool unpopulated except for a splash made by an invisible diver.

32 The search for Duchampian allusions in Ruscha's work can become dangerously obsessive. Does his series called *Stains* (1969) made with a variety of non-paint or ink substances such as egg yolk, 'Ketchup (Heinz)' and 'Sperm (human)' allude to Duchamp's work consisting of a spot of semen on dark cloth? Are the sheets of silk-screened chocolate he displayed in the Venice Biennale (*Chocolate Room*, 1970) anything to do with Duchamp's *Chocolate Grinder*? (Use a chocolate grinder as a printing press.)

33 Margit Rowell, in *Ruscha: Photographer*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 2006, 39.

34 Margaret Iversen, 'Following pieces: on performative photography', in James Elkins, ed., *Photography Theory*, Cork and New York, 2006, 91–108.

35 See special issue on Acconci, *Avalanche*, 6, Fall 1972, 30.

36 In conversation with me and in other interviews, Calle has insisted that she was unaware of Acconci's *Following Piece* when she made *Suite vénitienne*. However, after she'd taken the photos a friend told her about it. She made a trip to New York to visit Acconci who 'gave her his blessing'. See the account of this episode in Cécile Camart, 'Sophie Calle, 1978–1981: Genèse d'une fugure d'artiste', *Les Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, 85, Automne 2003, 64. See also the retrospective exhibition catalogue *M'as-tu vue?*, Pompidou Centre, Paris, 2003–4.

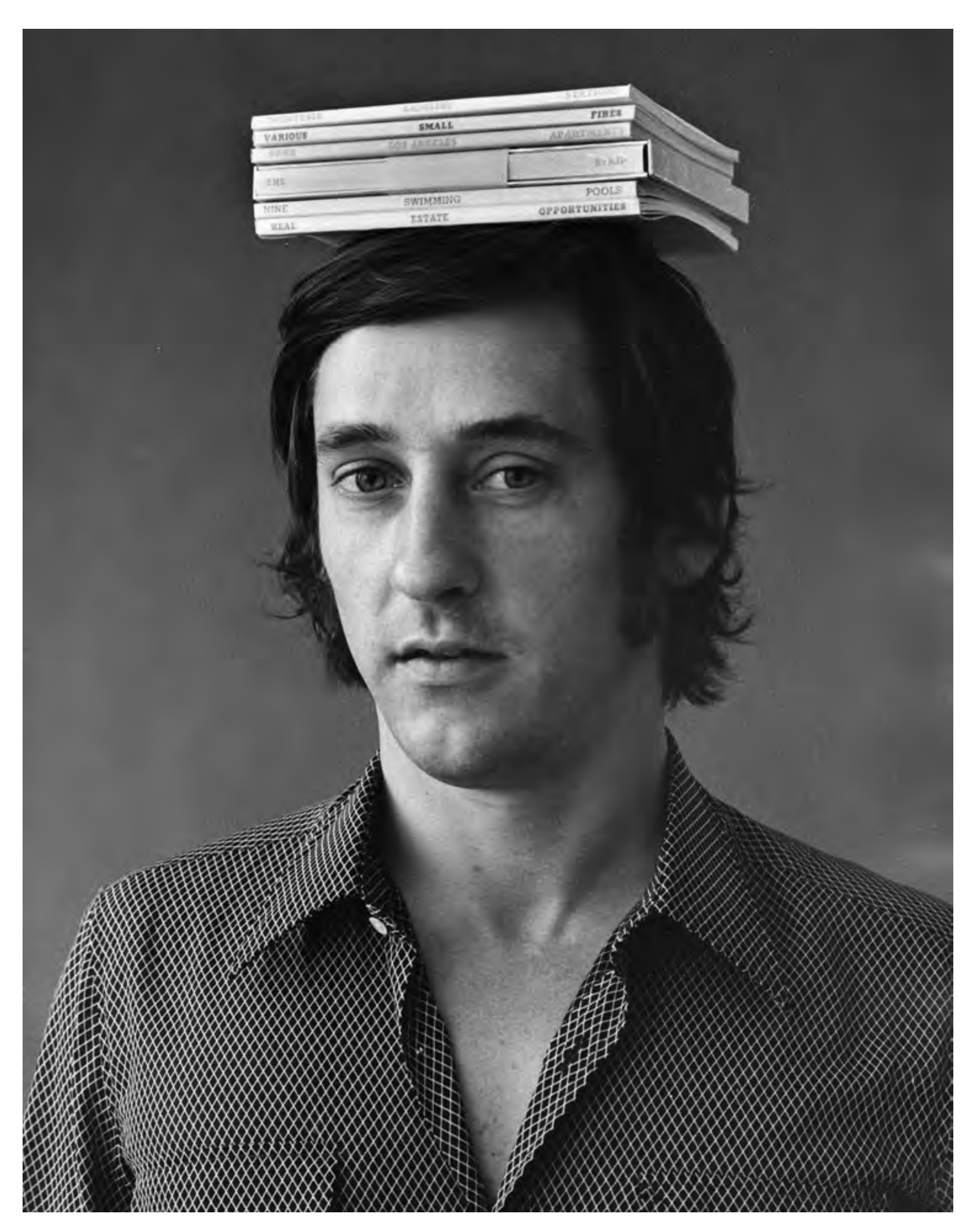
37 Yve-Alain Bois, 'Character Study', *Artforum*, April 2000, 126–31. See also his contribution to the Pompidou retrospective, 'Paper Tiger'.

38 Sophie Calle, *Suite Vénitienne*, trans. Dany Barash and Danny Hatfield, Seattle, 1988, 6. Originally published in French under the same title, 1983. Also relevant is Breton's account of his trailing of Jacqueline Lamba through the streets of Montmartre in *Mad Love*, trans. Mary Ann Caws, Lincoln, NE and London, 1987, 43.

39 Ruscha, *Leave*, 49.

40 It also recalls Duchamp's *Unhappy Readymade*, 1919, which involved hanging a geometry textbook by strings from a balcony exposed to wind and rain.

41 Briony Fer has argued this case about the art of the 1970s in her book, *The Infinite Line*, where, for example, she notes that the use of repetition is not *an*aesthetic, but 'provides the ground for this aesthetic terrain'. See Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line*, Yale and London, 2004, 158.



1 Jerry McMillan, *Ed Ruscha with six of his books balanced on his head*, 1970. Photo: courtesy of the artist and Craig Krull Gallery, Santa Monica, CA.

Photography after Conceptual Art Edited by Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen
 ISBN: 978-1-444-33360-2

3

ED RUSCHA, HEIDEGGER, AND DEADPAN PHOTOGRAPHY

ARON VINEGAR

Despite the variability of photographic practices in post-conceptual photography – from the so-called proto-conceptual photographic books of Ed Ruscha, to the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher, to their inheritors in the Düsseldorf School of Photography and beyond – one comes across a remarkable consistency in some of the descriptive terms used to account for this diversity. One of the most intriguing is the word 'deadpan'. The ambition of this chapter is to see if this term has any purchase in explaining what makes these photographs compelling. Does the deadpan do any real work for us, or is it a 'dummy concept' for something else we have trouble articulating about this stretch of photography? Is it merely a catch-all phrase for words such as straightforward, matter-of-fact, banal, ordinary, ironic, and non-artistic? Or does it offer a philosophical and aesthetic depth which these descriptions cannot?

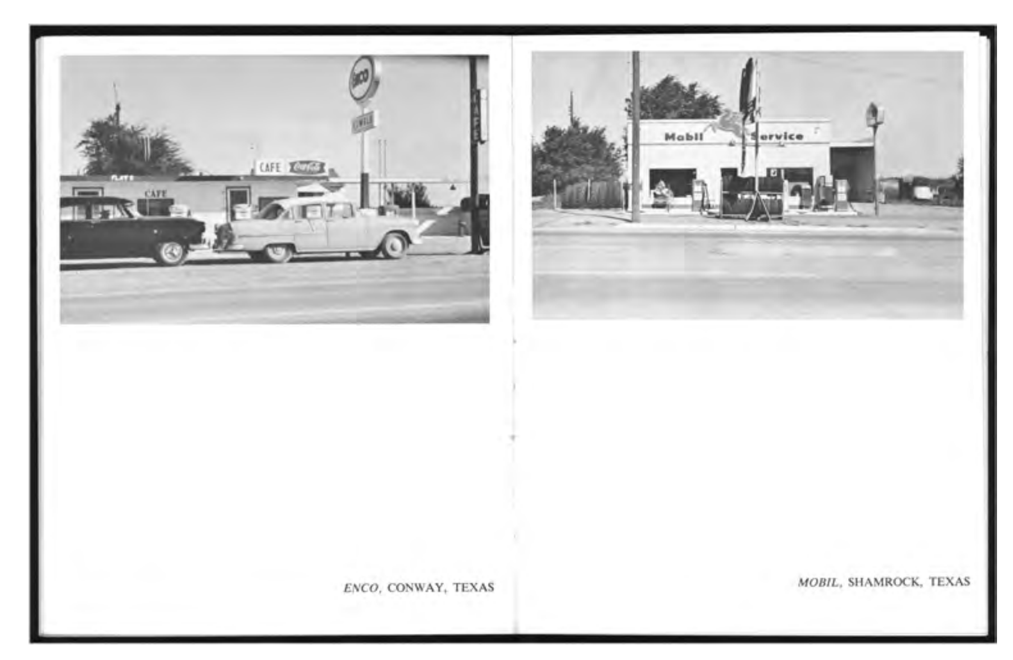
In what follows I will concentrate on Ed Ruscha's photographic books – of which he produced sixteen from the early 1960s to the late 1970s – because they seem to be the starting point for the application of the term deadpan to photography (plates 2, 3, 4, 10). I also want to put these thoughts through their paces in thinking about one exemplary photographic practice, and leave open the question of whether or not the logic of the deadpan as I engage with it here might prove insightful for other photographic practices described in such terms. I will proceed as follows. Firstly, I will provide a brief introduction to the concept of the deadpan in and out of photography, and introduce the vocabulary of 'indifference', 'fact', and 'facticity', that seems to appear whenever deadpan photography is raised. Secondly, I engage with these terms in relationship to Heideggerian philosophy, where they play a crucial role in world disclosure through the moods of attunement. Thirdly, I suggest that we shift our understanding of the deadpan away from a mode of 'rhetorical' delivery – often comedic in nature – and engage with it as a mood or attunement. I begin to explore these issues through Heidegger's understanding of mood as the determinate 'medium' that discloses our modes of being in the world. Fourthly, I posit that the 'evenness' of the deadpan relates to the relationship between what Heidegger calls 'indifference' and 'equanimity'. And finally, I will investigate some passages in the writings of the philosopher Stanley Cavell who talks about the silent-film star Buster Keaton – often seen as the epitome of deadpan humour – in terms of what he characterizes as the 'philosophical

mood' of Keaton's 'vision' of the world, and what this might have to say, if anything, about Ruscha's deadpan photography and its vision of the world (plate 5 and 6).

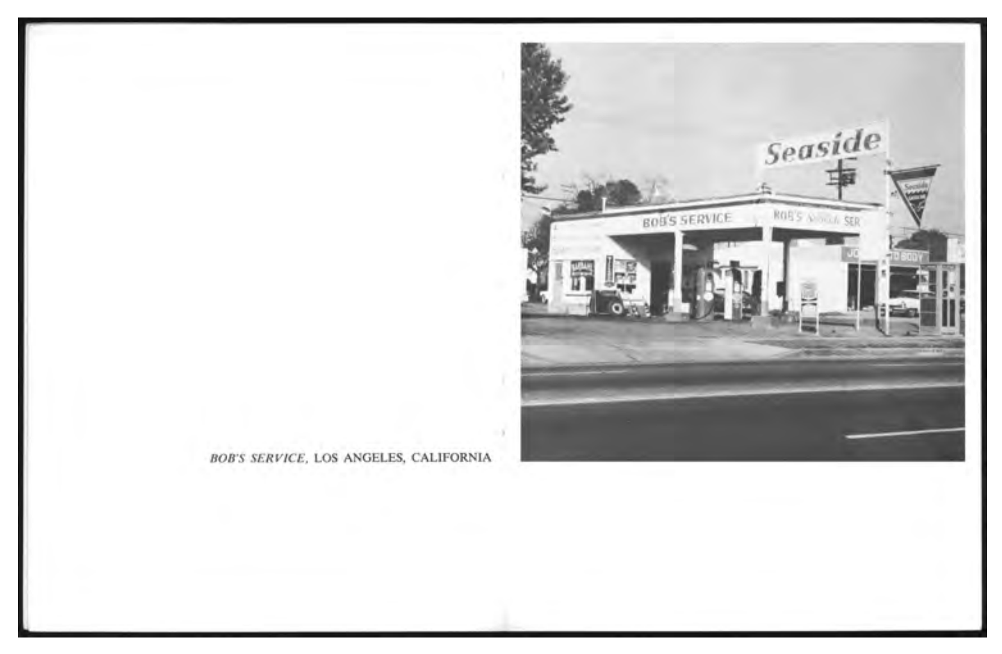
PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE DEADPAN

Deadpan is literally defined as a flat or emotionless face, the word 'pan' being slang for face in nineteenth-century America. Traditionally, it is considered a mode of rhetorical delivery, used in speeches, public lecturing, and comedy, in which humour is delivered without change in emotion or facial expression, usually while speaking in a monotone pitch.[1] It also suggests a kind of 'artless art' in its dry and direct mode of delivery. This type of humour has been primarily associated with Anglo-American culture. The term itself does not seem to have entered our lexicon as a one-word adverb or adjective for dry humour until the twentieth century. In photography, it is used to suggest a 'matter-of-fact' mode of delivery, an approach to photographic presentation that is devoid of subjective emotion or affect. At various times it has been used to describe some of the photographic practices of Robert Smithson, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Lewis Baltz, Stephen Shore, Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer, Hans Haacke, Thomas Barrow, and Sol LeWitt. No doubt there are other examples to be had. Its acceptance as a loose descriptive category for such photographic practices is embraced in a chapter entitled 'Deadpan' in Charlotte Cotton's survey, *Photography as Contemporary Art*, published in 2004.[2] In Cotton's words, these artists explore 'a cool, detached, and keenly sharp type of photograph'.[3] This point is echoed by Bernd and Hilla Becher's claim that their 'way of looking at things is "cool" and without an artist's subjective expression'.[4] Often deadpan photography is used as a shorthand way to suggest an ironic distancing from, and critical commentary on, issues of artistic skill, and the traditions of expressive art photography or 'committed' documentary photography (to jump ahead a bit, I would claim that the deadpan is not fundamentally ironic at all). The deadpan approach, then, is a mode of photography that seems emotionally detached or 'neutral' in the sense that it does not make outright judgments, and thus tends to emphasize what might be called an 'evidentiary' condition.

In photography, the deadpan first gained significant purchase in discussions about Ed Ruscha's photographic books.[5] In his 1970 essay 'Artists and photographs' – an influential text on conceptual and post-conceptual photography – Lawrence Alloway talked about the 'deadpan candor' of Ruscha's photographs.[6] At about the same time, the architect Denise Scott Brown in her article 'Pop Art, Permissiveness, and Planning' (1969), described Ruscha's *Sunset Strip*, 'a long accordion fold-out' showing 'every building on each side of the strip, each carefully numbered but without comment', as 'deadpan, a scholarly monograph with a silver cover and slip-on box jacket' that could, on first glance, 'be on the piazzas of Florence'.[7] For Scott Brown, Ruscha's photographic books are the primary exemplification of a nonjudgmental approach to the existing environment, providing a model of receptivity and openness to 'the very immanent world around us' at odds with premature systematizing and moralizing judgments about the everyday environment of American urban sprawl. Benjamin Buchloh's influential essay, 'Conceptual art 1962–69: from the aesthetic of administration to the critique of institutions' (1990), took the deadpan less as a



2 Ed Ruscha, '*Enco*, Conway, Texas' and '*Mobil*, Shamrock, Texas', from *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, 1962. Offset lithograph on paper and glassine dust jacket, 17.7 × 13.9 cm. Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center Library Collection. Photo: Courtesy of Walker Art Center.



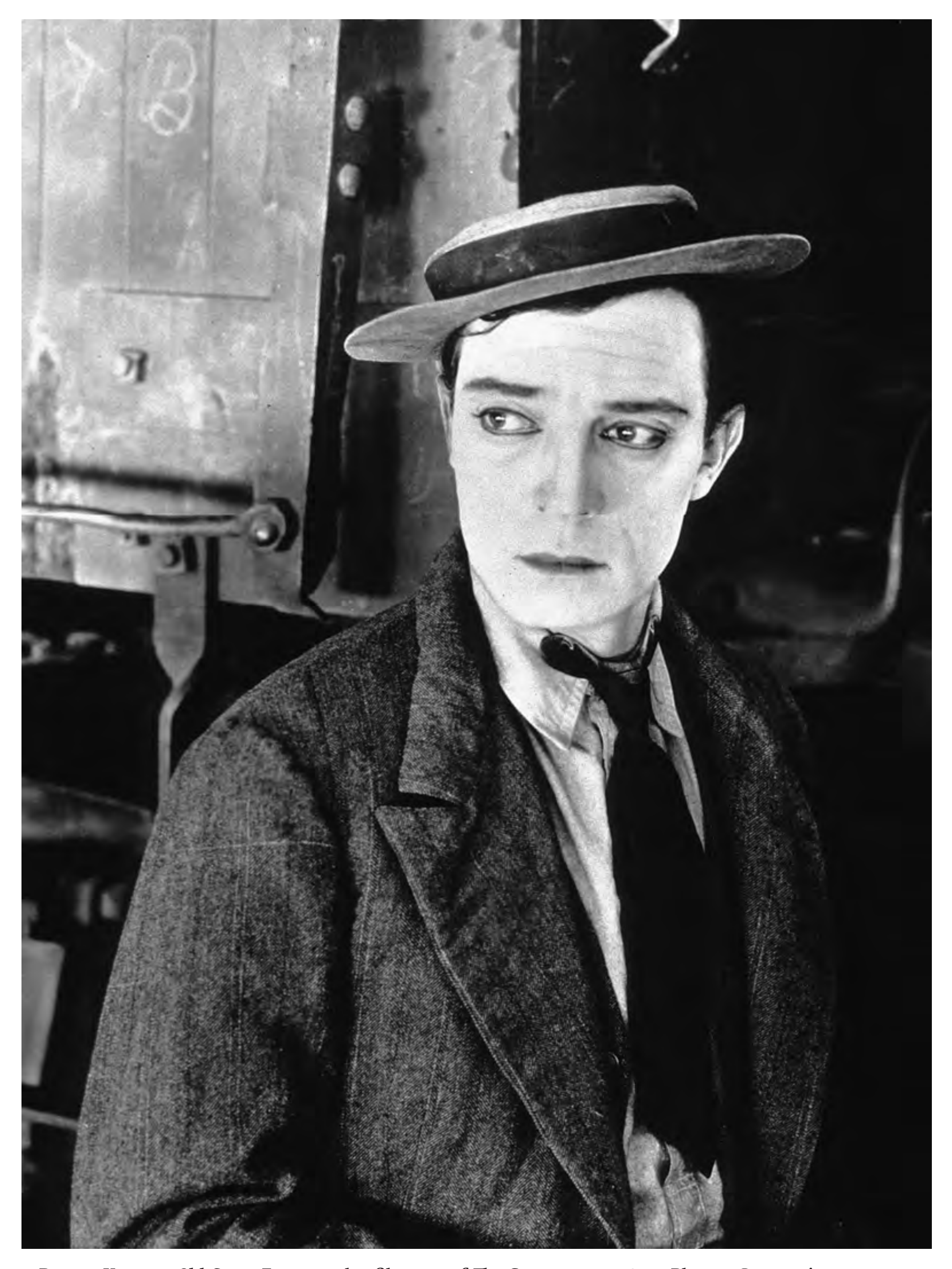
3 Ed Ruscha, '*Bob's Service*, Los Angeles, California', from *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, 1962. Offset lithograph on paper with glassine dust jacket, 17.7 × 13.9 cm. Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center Library Collection. Photo: Courtesy of Walker Art Center.



4 Ed Ruscha, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, 1966. Offset lithograph on paper, and silver mylar-covered slipcase, 17.7 × 13.9 cm. Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center Library Collection. Photo: Courtesy of Walker Art Center.



5 Buster Keaton, *The Cameraman*, 1928. Publicity still. Photo: © mptvimages.com



6 Buster Keaton, *Old Stone Face*, on the film set of *The Cameraman*, 1928. Photo: © mptvimages.com.

'positive' openness to the world around us than as a practice marked by its inseparability from administered society. Written under the aegis of Theodor Adorno, this essay and its vocabulary imbricates Ruscha's deadpan photography in conformity with, and incorporation of, the dominant structures of 'administered' society and its levelling effects which, in Adorno's terms, suppress unique particulars beneath 'indifferent' universality. For Buchloh, Ruscha's deadpan approach to photography is marked by an 'aesthetic of *indifference*', which is characterized by what he calls a 'commitment to an anti-hierarchical organization of a universally valid *facticity* operating as a total affirmation'.[8]

Five years later, Jeff Wall further pursued this Adornian interpretation in his influential essay '"Marks of indifference": aspects of photography in, or as, conceptual art'.[9] If, for Wall, photographic practices such as Ruscha's are not a total affirmation of administered society, as they seem to be for Buchloh, they nevertheless bear the 'marks of indifference' of their relationship and identification with 'baleful social forces' and the 'internalization of society's indifference to the happiness and seriousness of art'.[10] In a more recent essay, 'Ed Ruscha's one-way street', Jaleh Mansoor draws on the language of indifference and facticity from Buchloh's article but sees Ruscha's practice as much more engaged with, and critical of, mass culture than Buchloh does.[11] In the survey text, *Art Since 1900*, co-written by Rosalind Krauss, Benjamin Buchloh, Hal Foster, and Yve-Alain Bois, the Adornian interpretation of Ruscha's deadpan photographic books falls under the shadow of Robert Smithson's photographic practices, which are now seen as 'practical guides' to exploring and relishing, through dark humour, a 'world depleted of difference and thus of meaning'.[12] At this point, Adornian 'indifference' has joined forces with Smithson's entropic dissolution of organization and hierarchy into 'de-differentiation' and 'terminal sameness'.[13]

The important point to note here is that the vocabulary of 'indifference', and 'fact' or 'facticity' seems to come into play whenever the deadpan is raised in the context of Ruscha's photographic books. This is hardly surprising, as Ruscha himself claimed that his photographs were 'technical data like industrial photography' and that what he was after in his photographic books 'was no style or a non-statement with a no-style' that would result in a 'collection of facts'.[14] Alloway responds to this characterization by emphasizing their 'factual appearance'.[15] To my mind, Ruscha's account of his own work resonates with Roland Barthes' claim in his important essay '... That old thing, art ...', that pop art wants to 'desymbolize the object, to give it the obtuse and matte stubbornness of a fact'.[16] This sentence has often been read through a Baudrillardean lens as a desire to release the image from deep meaning into simulacral surface.[17] But Barthes is insistent on emphasizing the 'factographic' dimension of pop art, and notes that it features a philosophical quality of things, which we may call '*facticity*'.[18] I want to explore this vocabulary of 'facticity' and 'indifference' in relationship to Heidegger rather than Adorno, and, by a kind of *epoche*, to bracket out some of the 'given' connotations of these terms.[19]

ON FACTICITY, FACTUALITY, INDIFFERENCE, AND DIFFERENCE

It is often not quite clear how the word 'facticity' is being used in these contexts.[20] Facticity could be used in a broad sense to suggest all the entities

out there 'in' space, and thus to describe Ruscha's seemingly objective and disinterested accumulation and registering of that 'data' in his photographs without any overly conscious imposition of artistic selection or hierarchy. But Barthes might be using the word facticity to suggest a condition of 'factuality', a term that appears with some regularity in the work of phenomenologists such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. For Husserl, 'factuality' refers to the objects of experience, which appear as things found at determinate points in space and time but are nonetheless contingent. Sartre extends this to describe being thrown into the 'there' of a given or factual situation.[21] For Heidegger, factuality refers to the 'ontic' dimensions of the world; that is to say, it refers to all the sundry entities, things, or beings 'in' the world. Heidegger and Ruscha equally provide long lists of these things in their works, be they houses, benches, footbridges, jugs, ploughs, or trees, records, pools, people, cakes, and gas stations.[22] In Heidegger's work factuality is always thought about in relationship to what he calls 'facticity', and it is this relationship that I want to highlight in connection with the deadpan.[23]

For Heidegger, facticity, in contrast to factuality, is a *way* of being-in-the-world rather than the fact of being an entity in the world. Facticity describes that mode of being in which Being becomes a question for itself, that is to say, Dasein. Although facticity is not merely a *factum brutum* – to be simply equated with all the other myriad objects in space that are 'objectively present' – it is never completely detached from its factuality. We can always understand ourselves and others in ways that emphasize their factuality – so and so is of a certain height, weight, eye colour, and so on. These physical or quantitative factors are indeed crucial to who we are, but they do not account for *how* they are interpreted as existential attributes of our being-in-the-world.[24] Facticity denotes this 'how' of Dasein's being-there; the way in which it finds itself thrown into the world among other beings. Heidegger offers the relationship between facticity and factuality as a way of articulating the difference between beings as mere things, and beings that are aware of their being-in-the-world in particular ways. Thus facticity and factuality are inextricably entwined but are not reducible to one another. Indeed, the difference between factictity and factuality makes all the difference in the world. Facticity is a mode of questioning that opens up onto what Heidegger calls 'ontological difference', the primordial difference between beings and Being, between the 'ontic' and 'ontological' realms. We might call (ontological) 'indifference' the absence of ontological difference: it points to the reduction, levelling, or equation of Being with mere beings. Despite the words 'reduction' and 'levelling', Heidegger makes it clear that the analytic of Dasein must *begin* with indifference.

One of photography's primary tasks is, I would argue, to embrace our exposure to 'ontological indifference' as the determinate condition for any kind of ontological difference to manifest itself. That is to say, that photography never strays too far from the first steps in the analytic of Dasein: to describe all the ontic things in the world, up to and including the human. Deadpan photography makes this perspicuous. Stanley Cavell alludes to this in *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, when he writes that there

is an 'ontological equality of objects and human subjects in photographs'.[25] Cavell first raises this 'equality' in relationship to Buster Keaton's deadpan countenance, his remarkable 'stone face' that registers the evenness of his response to objects in the world that, in their obduracy, rarely accommodate themselves to him, despite his remarkable agility (plate 5).[26] Although Keaton is not necessarily at peace with the world 'out there', he is of a piece with it, and his extraordinary gaze suggests his 'acceptance of the external world and the things in it'.[27] One might say that deadpan photography could be understood as a way of seeing how the totality of facts constitutes a world that is not merely a 'universe of things', but not quite a world of use and 'common significance' either.

In a similar fashion to Buster Keaton's engagement with the object world, Ruscha's photographic books cannot be wholly understood in terms of their 'readiness-to-hand' for reading, being looked at, leafed through, or even being handled; but nor are they simply 'present-at-hand' as obdurate things in the world. His books are neither articles of use nor are they neutral things. Nor are they simply 'artist's books'. Ruscha himself is more often than not photographed in terms of his bodily contiguity and balance *with* them. In a bust-length photograph taken by the artist Jerry McMillan, Ruscha confronts the viewer with an expressionless face and six of his books stacked on his head, as if to say that his relationship to these books is not simply a matter-of-facts but a matter of comportment, about how we hold ourselves in the world (see plate 1). In another photograph by McMillan, Ruscha is lying down on his back in the middle of what looks like a rumpled metallic silver drop cloth, with the top of his head pointed towards the viewer and an array of his photographic books placed loosely over him like a blanket or a second set of loose clothing (plate 7). There is a parallel here between his bodily position as a 'table-top' surface, on which objects are placed, and his practice of photographing commercial objects on flat surfaces such as floors, rugs, or tables.[28] The whole *mise-en-scène* of this image recalls the staging of his stunning photography-based print entitled *Sweets, Meats, Sheets* of 1975, which shows packages of those three quotidian items on a satiny-red backcloth (plate 8). Siri Engberg notes that Ruscha spent a great deal of time arranging the objects for this 'commerical shoot', which was described by Ruscha as 'doing a setup where you make a world on a little tabletop'.[29] But does this explain the photograph of Ruscha covered by his books? Is he the table on which objects are placed, or is he placing himself as a mere object within the world of other objects (his books) on a silver backcloth that is analogous to the red one on which sweets, meats, and sheets are elsewhere propped? Is the realm of objects in *Sweets, Meats, Sheets*, which was shot horizontally, but subsequently oriented vertically, meant to recall the ontological realm of the upright human stance? Equally, is Ruscha's horizontality in McMillan's photograph meant to suggest his imbrication with the ontic realm of the commodity? I take it that the ambiguity is pertinent.

In either case the world Ruscha has made is disconcerting, fragile, and barely hangs together as a world. The packages in *Sweets, Meats, Sheets* were propped up – like the armature that supports the Hollywood sign in his paintings – photographed horizontally and subsequently rotated and exhibited vertically, so that the packages seem to be simultaneously suspended and falling like the books



7 Jerry McMillan, *Ed Ruscha covered with twelve of his books*, 1970. Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Craig Krull Gallery, Santa Monica, CA.

that are precariously balanced on various parts of Ruscha's body (plate 7). In the latter image, his book *Stains* is rotated at a ninety degree angle and appears to be propped up by Ruscha's shoulder and arm, in such a way that a crisply demarcated 'blank' white page faces us directly parallel to, and in relationship with, Ruscha's slightly angled head and deadpan expression. Or consider McMillan's photograph of Ruscha opening his book *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (plate 9). It reveals an unfolded stretch of the eight-metre band from the accordion format book, angled at forty-five degrees and held comfortably within his partially outstretched arms. He is not facing the book or simply looking at it; rather, his head is parallel to that portion of the strip, his profile pressed against its surface. Its surface, in turn, touches the surface of other images fixed to the wall. It is an image that echoes the flat ribbons of Sunset Strip, which unfurled 'parallel' to Ruscha's Ford as the street slid by the side windows, and which were captured by the mounted 35 mm camera with a motor drive that shot a continuous strip of motion picture film.[30] This is all to say that facticity begins to open a world at that point where photography responds to, and brushes against, those 'facts'.



8 Ed Ruscha, *Sweets, Meats, Sheets*, from the 'Tropical Fish Series', 1975. Six-colour screenprint with lacquer overprint, 83.2 × 65.6 cm. Photo: © 1975 Ed Ruscha and Gemini G.E.L.



9 Jerry McMillan, *Ed Ruscha unfolding* Every Building on the Sunset Strip, 1967. Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Craig Krull Gallery, Santa Monica, CA.

MOOD AND ATTUNEMENT

For Heidegger, facticity is enabled by our fundamental attunements or moods. It is the 'how' according to which one is in such and such a way. In Heidegger's words: 'Dasein's openness to the world is existentially constituted by the mood of an attunement.'[31] The essential character of mood is that it 'displaces us into such and such a relation to the world, into this or that understanding or disclosure of the world'.[32] Heidegger goes on to note that attunements are never simply a consequence of our thinking, doing, and acting, but rather 'the presupposition for such things, the ''medium'' within which they first appear'.[33] Mood is like an atmosphere in which we are immersed and which attunes us through and through. This should make it clear that for Heidegger, mood cannot be reduced to the realm of psychological 'feelings' or any anthropological understanding of 'lived experience'. That is to say, we are always 'in' a mood; it is never 'in' us, nor do we simply 'possess' such and such a mood. In sum, moods are world disclosing. They make a world possible as a particular configuration of sense. In moods, we are exposed, vulnerable, and open to the world; we are affected, touched, and struck by things. It is only through mood that the world and the things in it can matter to us at all. Mood is not a mode of 'knowing' the world, but the precondition for ways of encountering it.

What I am trying to suggest is that we shift our sense of the deadpan from simply a mode of rhetorical delivery to a fundamental mood or attunement that reveals and modulates our modes of being in the world. In reviewing some of the literature on Ruscha, one gets an inchoate sense of this possibility in passages

that call attention to the 'deadpan tone' of his photographic books.[34] One might say that the *medium* within which these books appear to us is of a deadpan tonality. Heidegger often refers to mood specifically as a 'medium'. Perhaps the deadpan is the discovery of a new medium within photography at this time, if we are willing to consider a medium as a way in which we relate to a particular practice and not just its material constituents. More strongly, it is the nature of a new medium to be taken up and put through its paces, which might give philosophical depth to the persistent use of this term to describe certain stretches of post-conceptual photography.[35]

INDIFFERENCE AND EQUANIMITY

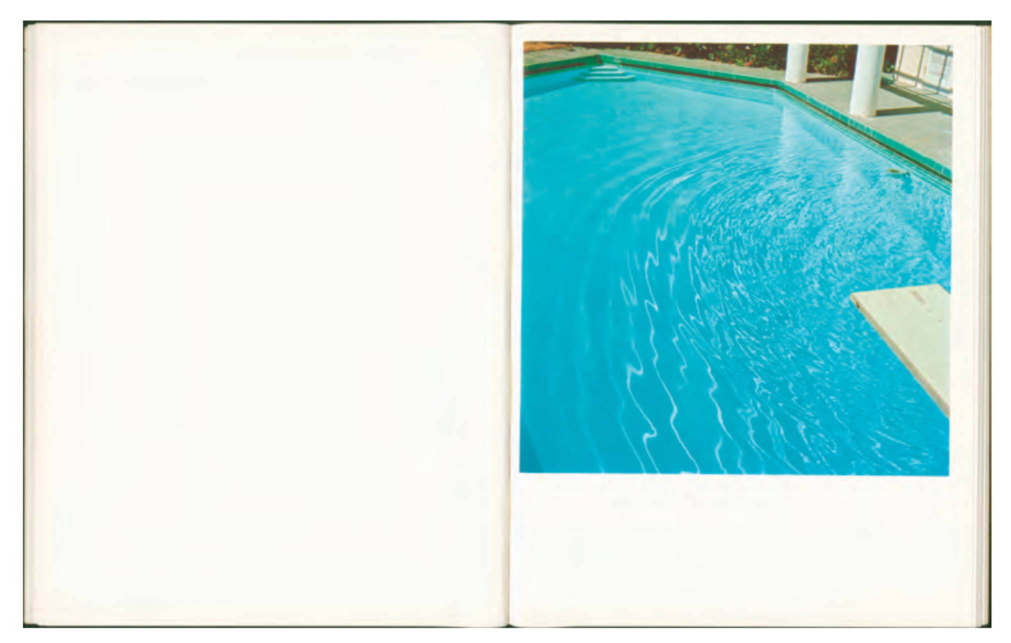
The descriptive qualities that are attributed to the deadpan – the flattening out of expression, the evenness of affect, its monotone colouration, its apparent disinterest and distance from any engaged relationship to the world – are also the qualities of 'indifference', a term which Heidegger uses to describe the average way in which Dasein exists most of the time in the world. He characterizes this condition as a levelling down in which we are caught up in what he calls the 'everydayness' of the 'they' – which is 'us' in our supposedly 'inauthentic' way of being-in-the-world. (It is relevant to note that in 'Marks of Indifference' Jeff Wall continuously refers to Ruscha as inhabiting or impersonating the 'Everyperson' or 'Everyman' in his approach to photography.)[36] In *Being and Time*, the 'persistent, smooth, and pallid lack of mood' of the 'grey everyday' is marked by 'indifference to everything' (the language of 'flatness', 'levelling', and 'lack of depth' is ubiquitous in Heidegger's account of the everyday).[37] But it is important to note that indifference is not merely 'fallen' or 'inauthentic' Dasein for Heidegger, although it is often taken in that way. Indifference is also the condition that allows for the Being of beings-as-a-whole to emerge; that is to say, it is the precondition for our dawning awareness of ontological difference.[38] As Heidegger notes, 'in the most indifferent and harmless everydayness the being of Dasein can burst forth in its "facticity", that mode of being-in-the-world'.[39] In fact, in the fundamental moods of 'boredom' or 'anxiety' the sinking into indifference is what manifests being as a whole.[40] As Heidegger notes, 'understanding of being is to begin with indifference. That it *is* without differentiating in any regard to specific ways of being. Our understanding of being is indifferent but it is at any time differentiable.'[41]

This is often intuited by critics and historians in their accounts of certain strands of post-conceptual photography. Thierry de Duve, for example, comments on how Bernd and Hilla Becher's industrial photographs are photographed under a set of uniform conditions that emphasize an evenness of tone and setting which, precisely through this uniformity, fosters a heightened awareness of minute aesthetic differences.[42] But these differences do not simply remain within the ontic or aesthetic realms. A series of watertowers tend to look alike at first glance, yet they begin to awaken in us an ability to see how 'the universe of things' can become a way of relating and responding to each something and someone – co-existing, one might say. We no longer see them merely as 'brute facts' that are 'objectively present' to be tabulated and compared in 'typologies' as the Bechers might say. That these photographs are 'cool' and 'objective' just demonstrates that deadpan photography encompasses within itself the realm of

the factual, and that it raises, rather than merely reflects, the possibility that 'our' failures of sensibility and responsiveness to how factuality might relate to facticity can manifest in a form of 'coldness' towards the world. The 'openness' at the juncture of the possible failure of sensibility – let's say a propensity to scan, tabulate, and categorize those water towers in lieu of accounting for how difference and indifference are interwoven as we 'pan' across their surfaces – is what the deadpan latches onto.

In *Being and Time*, the mood of indifference is, at various points, described as 'smooth', a 'muffling fog', and the 'grey everyday'.[43] These images conjure up an atmosphere in which everything is reduced to the same colour, texture, and tone, and in which we are in the world but at the same time seem to withdraw from it, or it from us. In many of the photographs that we characterize as deadpan there is a preference for dedramatized lighting and an evenness of tone verging on what we might call the 'grey everyday'. If, as Cavell has argued, black and white film is the natural medium of 'visual drama' due to its strong value contrasts evocative of chiaroscuro in painting, then deadpan photography avoids such contrasts.[44] David Bourdon notes that for *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, 'Ruscha photographed the Strip in the harsh light of high noon, making it appear as dull and tacky-looking as a Midwestern Main Street' (plate 4).[45] In 'Marks of Indifference', Jeff Wall characterizes this as Ruscha's 'low-contrast monchromaticism'.[46] For Robert Smithson the 'cloud' and 'sun' dials on his Kodak instamatic camera were not settings for degrees of contrast, but rather registered different values of relatively 'undifferentiated conditions'.[47] Or consider Bernd and Hilla Becher's many photographs of the Oberhausen industrial area in Germany, most of which were taken under overcast skies in the early morning or mid-day in order to eliminate shadow and foster a neutral atmosphere of the 'grey everyday'. Equally, Jeff Wall's light boxes create an evenness of projection for the cibachromes, and thus, in many ways, de-dramatize his tableau-like narratives, as if there was no build up of plot or emotional intensity but rather the display of an equanimity of mood that subtends any modulations of affect and distributes them across the surface. Ruscha once noted that his intervention in the layout of his books was important, because 'the pictures have to be in the right sequence, one without a mood taking over'.[48]

Heidegger frequently positions our immersion in the mood of indifference revealed by the grey everyday (and other fundamental attunements such as anxiety and boredom) as opening us up to the 'nothingness', 'abyss' or 'void' of Being. I think we can bring these thoughts to bear on one of the primary design features of Ruscha's photographic books, the ubiquitous and constitutive role that the unmarked blank page plays in defining their status *as* books. In *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* the book is dominated by the eight-metre long blank 'ribbon' which runs down the middle of the accordion-folded band of paper, and which is as important, and more prominent, than the two narrower photographic bands of the Sunset Strip running on either side of it (plates 4 and 9). Or take for example *Nine Swimming Pools and a Broken Glass* (plate 10). The ten colour photographs are simply overwhelmed by the fifty-four blank pages that comprise the book.[49] One can leaf through five pages before encountering a photograph. Ruscha has stated that the reason for the many blank pages was to adhere to the initial 'performative' decision to make a book consisting of precisely nine swimming pools, and that



10 Ed Ruscha, *Nine Swimming Pools and a Broken Glass*, 1968. Four-colour offset reproduction on paper with glassine dust jacket, 17.7 × 13.9 cm. Photo: © Ed Ruscha. Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery.

those pages were meant to give it the necessary 'heft' to allow it to be handled as a book.[50]

Ruscha's recourse to blank pages undoubtedly contributes to the ontic weight and factuality of his books' existence as physical objects in the world. But this isn't an entirely satisfactory explanation, as it is clear that there is a sense in which the blank pages are not there merely to lend the books ontic weight, but rather that the rhythm, pacing, and appearance of these blank pages in relationship to the photographs is essential to their pervasive underlying mood, and contributes to their 'ontological' weight. And here we need to be a bit more precise and say that the blankness of these pages does not appear 'tragic' or 'catastrophic' in the way that Heidegger's existential language of 'nothingness', 'abyss', and 'void' might suggest. The tonality of the deadpan is hardly tragic or catastrophic.[51] The blank pages are interwoven into the very fabric of most of Ruscha's books in such a way that the blank pages are integral to the mood of the everyday world as the viewer moves through the photographs. For example, in *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1962) the photographs are laid out in an astonishing variety of relationships with the white space of the page, such that one might see the entirely blank pages as part of this variety (plates 2 and 3). This is also apparent in the typographic spacing in the titles on the book covers, and in the 'outbreaks of spacing' that occur in the paratactic rhythms of side street names and building numbers that dot the empty ribbon in *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (plate 4).[52]

One might posit that these 'blank' pages (I prefer the word 'blank' to 'empty' to describe them) have a relationship to Heideggerian 'danger' – the risk that we

might be unwilling to acknowledge that blankness is a claim made on us. Or perhaps it is more akin to what Cavell describes as Keaton's species of comedy that accepts human limitations, thus 'denying neither the abyss that at any time might open before our plans, nor the possibility, despite that open possibility, of living with good if resigned spirits, and with eternal hope'.[53] One does not know when or where that open possibility might present itself since it is part of the patterning of life – its 'layout' so to speak. Thus that opening is not something we fall into but rather that we confront in the ordinary task of turning the pages of Ruscha's books. If there is any 'danger' here it is not one of 'plunging' down to the levelling-off of the 'fallen' everyday and mere indifference, but rather that we might want to rise above this ordinary condition, and thus fail to acknowledge that the everyday world – blanks and all – is our world. Ruscha writes that he was trying to make a 'cohesive thing' with his books, and only with them did he get a 'complete feeling of creation'.[54] Although we can interpret the phrase as suggesting 'artistic' creation, we might also understand that 'feeling of creation' as his sense of world disclosure enabled through the mood of his books, in which indifference is integral to the facticity of the world.

It should be clear by now that the term 'indifference' is not merely negative. In fact, it opens out on to what Heidegger calls 'equanimity'. Equanimity is a potential modification of indifference and is characterized by a calm and even-tempered 'resoluteness' that has a vision of 'the possible situations of the potentiality-of-being-as-a whole'.[55] But here I want to propose that we shift the emphasis from the volitional, heroic, and tragic connotations of Heideggerian 'resoluteness' towards the terms 'calm', 'even-tempered', and 'refraining from self assertion'.[56] For it is the 'sober readiness' that is the heart of equanimity and which is intimately related to Heidegger's understanding of what he calls the '*equiprimordial disclosedness* of the world'.[57] Our way of relating to the world is not an 'inner' condition that reaches 'out' to it, but rather one that arises from our being-in-the-world that has the character of 'being-there-with' the world that is disclosed through mood. Thus disclosure and attunement are intimately linked: '*In attunement lies existentially a disclosive submission to world out of which things that matter to us can be encountered*'.[58] What is striking in this sentence from *Being and Time* is that Heidegger italicizes *every* word, as if each one might matter to us, all might bear equal weight of priority and expressiveness. Thus indifference, not caring enough about anything, gives way to equanimity, an openness to caring about possibly everything . . . in the right mood.

ON CAVELL, KEATON, AND THE 'BEST CASE'

This is the appropriate time to turn to Buster Keaton, Stanley Cavell, and the deadpan. The great silent film actor Buster Keaton is probably the most famous and striking example of deadpan humour. Keaton's movies such as *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928), *The General* (1927), *The Navigator* (1924), and *The Cameraman* (1928), all feature his trademark deadpan visage and attitude to the world, that never flinches no matter what mishap befalls him (plates 1 and 5). At various points throughout this chapter I have alluded to a remarkable instance in the philosopher Stanley Cavell's work – teased out in three different but overlapping stretches of writing in *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (1979), *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (1971), and the essay 'What

becomes of things on film' (1978) – that directly refers to the logic of Buster Keaton's comedy as one that 'absorbs skepticism'. As Cavell has put it, '[Keaton's] refinement is to know everything skepticism can think of.'[59] He suggests that Keaton's deadpan humour is an ideal attitude in the face of scepticism; a stance toward the world and others in it that neither succumbs to scepticism nor definitively overcomes it. One might call it a 'comic acknowledgment' of the world.[60]

Cavell's account of Keaton centres on his particular countenance and the 'olympian resourcefulness of his body'.[61] The lack of emotion in his face and his eternal agility are signs of Keaton's peculiar receptiveness to the world. His gaze allows an *evenness* or readiness for the world, whatever it may offer. Such a gaze resists a particular understanding of the world that Cavell characterizes as the 'best case' in external world and other minds scepticism. For Cavell, the best case means an object or person that carries the right kind of exemplarity or representativeness for us. For example, one might say from this perspective that an apple 'compresses' within itself materiality as whole, such that if this 'case' fails to do this for me, I would begin to doubt that the world out there exists at all. Or it would be to say that this person 'compresses' within her- or himself my view of psychic reality as a whole, that they exemplify humanity as such, so that if I can't believe in *this* person then I can't know *any* other person or mind.[62]

Keaton is not attuned to the world in this way: rather, his is 'a way of being human . . . that allows an evenness in it [the world] or readiness for it that would not understand the exclusive or compressed stake in a best case; a being for whom any object might be as good as any other, in a world in which any might be loaded.'[63] No case is best for him because every case is best. A book like *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* calls attention to the impossibility, or at least difficulty, of the 'best case' when it comes to deadpan photography (plates 4 and 9). In a sense, I am taking this quite literally. In *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, the expansive accordion-folded band is 'compressed' and gathered between the covers of a small book, 17.7 × 13.9 cm, and enclosed in a silver covered slip-'case'. But it is hardly the 'best case'. The book does exist in a compressed state within its slip-case, but it can't be completely seen or viewed in that condition, even when opened and leafed through in a rhythm of folding and unfolding. Our engagement with its evenness of response to the Sunset Strip that takes in 'every building', in which any building might be as good as any other, does not allow for a best or worst case. Expression is evened out, modulated, and dispersed across the band, and its expansiveness – its openness to a stretch of the world out there in its plenitude and emptiness – cannot be contained within the bounds of the book. With the band completely spread out, all that remains of the strip's attachment to the book once it has been laid out flat and opened to its full expanse is a mere three-inch surplus flap of ordinary paper glued to the front paste-down. It is as if it simultaneously says that there is no 'best case' to compress and that even within this expansive stretch of the world unfolded before us there is more than we can know or take in even if we are open and ready for whatever it offers. The dead-panning movement of Ruscha's camera that results in an image like *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* resonates with Gilles Deleuze's description of Buster Keaton's 'pure continuous trajectory' through the object world. Keaton's continuous movement encompasses the rapid cuts, transitions, and gaps as he moves from object to object within his world, just as the eight-metre unfurled

band of *Sunset Strip* displays its dead-pan trajectory through its multiple accordion folds, the ten cut and glued sections that comprise its length, and the gaps opened up by the empty lots, cut off cars, and cross streets that puncture the paper-thin plane of the building fabric.[64]

The deadpan attitude exemplified by Ruscha refuses to allow us to be too hasty in our categorization of good, bad, best, or worst objects or people in the world. This should recall Denise Scott Brown's suggestion, which used Ruscha as its primary example, that we might cultivate a sensitivity to the world – heighten our responsiveness to it – by withholding judgment. She reminds us that it is a matter of our attunement or mood towards objects in the world – in her words, 'an open-minded and nonjudgmental investigation' of it – that would enable us to do so.[65] This would seem to involve, as we have seen, a sense of openness, readiness, equanimity, and, at times, inexpression. We should hardly be surprised, then, to find that Cavell also talks about Keaton in terms of the 'philosophical mood of his countenance' and his 'capacity for sight, or for human awareness generally'.[66] I want to remain with this thought in order to conclude with some reflections on what this altered relation of photography to the world might be about.

What if we were to push Scott Brown's idea of 'withholding' towards something like a hyphenated 'with-holding,' somewhat analogous to Heidegger's understanding of 'being-with' the world? Withholding in the usual sense suggests a subjective 'holding back', a withdrawal of feeling that might tend to look like privileged knowingness, objectivity, or a species of ironic distancing. But the cool, deadpan approach to photography is not an ironic distancing, as if the photographer were engaged in private asides to some privileged or assumed audience (the audience is precisely not 'given', in fact). And deadpan photography is not interested in seeing the world from above or below in order to record the 'being-objectively-present-together of things' in the world, but rather in situating itself at the limit of the world, alongside its surfaces as a way of 'being with the world'.[67] Thus, it is the surface quality of the everyday, its very opacity to us, that is the precondition for its disclosure. Because the everyday world is in some sense closed to us, it faces us as a surface of exposure. As Bernd and Hilla Becher claim, they do not want to depict their industrial buildings from above or below, but head on, a desire also voiced by Ed Ruscha in his writings and interviews. Deadpan photography is immanent, and it is directed either straight towards the world, or literally 'pans' across it like the camera mounted on Ruscha's car driving along Sunset Strip. After all, mood comes neither from the 'outside' nor from the 'inside' but rather from the fact that 'knowing is grounded beforehand in a Being-already-alongside-the world'.[68]

Perhaps the mood of awareness, readiness, and openness to the world exemplified in the best deadpan photography might be the expression of wonder in our era. This claim might strike us as counterintuitive: firstly because, in the later work of Heidegger, moods are epochal, and the inaugural mood of wonder is reserved for the early Greeks (for Heidegger, our era is an odd shade of grey that consists of a mixture of fear, boredom, anxiety, hope, confidence, and at times joy); and secondly because we are so used to thinking about wonder in terms of the extremes of expression – perhaps as open-mouthed and wide-eyed awe – that we are less alert to the fact that an expression of wonder might at times register as inexpression. Or to be more accurate, it might register as an evenly distributed

expression – or, in Heideggerian terms, as 'equanimity'. Taken in the latter sense, wonder would then be continuous with what Heidegger characterizes as allowing things to be 'encountered in a circumspect heedful way', which he goes on to say, 'has . . . the character of *being affected or moved*'.[69] And it is precisely the mood of wonder that strikes us with the awareness that the object does matter, but we do not know precisely the mode of this mattering. In the words of Heidegger, 'Wonder does not divert itself from the usual but on the contrary, *adverts* to it, precisely as what is the most unusual of everything and in everything.'[70] Wonder might very well look like a deadpan expression, just as a state of calm, cheerfulness, and even joy might pervade 'authentic anxiety', as indeed it does for Heidegger.[71] Heidegger has a wonderful phrase that seems to capture the idea of wonder as deadpan expression: 'resolute raptness'. I take this phrase not to mean wonder as an interruption of the ordinary experience of everyday life, but rather the ability to remain open to the ordinary as a site of the disclosure of wonder. It is not meant to expose and overcome the relativity of the ordinary in the pursuit of some distanced and more 'knowing' condition, but rather to abide there so that it resonates with Cavell's claim, in relation to Buster Keaton, that 'no possibility, of fakery, simulation, or hallucination, goes beyond the actualities of his existence', or Ruscha's observation that Los Angeles' 'superficiality' can be profound and funny and worth living for, as it makes one aware that everything is ephemeral when you look at it from the right angle.[72]

Jean-Luc Nancy has posed the following question: 'can we think of a triviality of sense – a quotidianness, a banality, *not* as the dull opposite of scintillation, but as the grandeur of the simplicity in which sense exceeds itself?'[73] Perhaps we can. In an interview Ruscha noted that his first book, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, had 'an inexplicable thing I was looking for, and that was a kind of ''Huh?''' To his credit, Ruscha never attempts to convert that 'Huh?' into an 'Aha!' Not long after, he remarked that 'one of them [his books] will ''kind of almost'' knock you on your ass.' The odds are, though, that you are still standing with the book in your hand and nary an expression crossing your face.

Notes

A special thank you to Maggie Iversen and Diarmuid Costello for their insightful comments and patient reading of this chapter. I also thank Whitney Davis who invited me to give an earlier version of this chapter at a small colloquium he organized on *World-Making and World Art* at The Consortium for the Arts at UC Berkeley in May 2008.

1 Randall Knoper, 'Funny personations: theater and the popularity of the deadpan style', in Knoper, *Acting Naturally: Mark Twain in the Culture of Performance*, Berkeley, CA, 1995, 55–73.

2 Charlotte Cotton, *The Photograph as Contemporary Art*, London, 2004.

3 Cotton, *The Photograph as Contemporary Art*, 24.

4 Cotton, *The Photograph as Contemporary Art*, 26; Stefan Gronet, 'Alternative pictures: conceptual art and the artistic emancipation of photography in Europe', in Douglas Fogle, ed., *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960–1982*, Minneapolis, MN, 2003, 89.

5 It should be noted that when Ruscha talked about his photographic books in terms of humour he sometimes described them as 'capers'. But one author notes that he seemed dissatisfied with this description. See A. D. Coleman, 'I'm not really a photographer', in Fogle, *The Last Picture Show*, 21–2.

6 Lawrence Alloway, 'Artists and photographs', in Fogle, *The Last Picture Show*, 20.

7 Denise Scott Brown, 'On pop art, permissiveness, and planning', *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, May 1969, 185.

8 Benjamin Buchloh, 'Conceptual art 1962–1969: from the aesthetic of administration to the critique of institutions', *October*, 55, Winter 1990, 121–2. Buchloh is also calling attention to issues of random sampling and aleatory choice in Ruscha's work.

9 Jeff Wall, '"Marks of indifference": aspects of photograpy in, or as, conceptual art', in Fogle, *The Last Picture Show*, 41.

10 Wall, '"Marks of indifference"', 44. Drawing on Adorno, Wall notes that in conceptual art the loss of 'sensuousness' in art's reduction to an intellectual concept allows us to experience that loss as such, that is, *as* a loss. According to him, this accounts for these photographs' status as 'dull', 'boring', and 'insignificant'.

11 Jaleh Mansoor, 'Ed Ruscha's one-way street', *October*, 111, Winter 2005, 133. This issue of *October* is devoted to the work of Ed Ruscha.

12 Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin Buchloh, *Art since 1900: Modernism, Anti-Modernism, Postmodernism* vol. 2, London, 2004, 505–8. The section on Ruscha bears the heading 'Deadpan transience'.

13 Foster, Krauss, Bois and Buchloh, *Art since 1900*, 505.

14 John Coplans, 'Concerning *Various Small Fires*: Edward Ruscha discusses his perplexing publications' and Henri Man Barendse, 'Ed Ruscha: an interview', in Alexandra Schwartz (ed.), *Leave any Information at the Signal*, Cambridge, MA, 2002, 24, 26, 217.

15 Alloway, 'Artists and photographs', 20.

16 Roland Barthes, '. . . That old thing, art . . .', in Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard, New York, 1985, 201–2.

17 I do believe that Ruscha's photographs – and many of his paintings – 'desymbolize' or are meant to suggest a 'pre-symbolic' state. Here I am thinking of Ruscha's paintings of simple words with one syllable, such as 'oof', 'smash', 'ok', 'not', that explore the constitutive indeterminancy of primitive language games in which we don't know the 'force' of such utterances, and thus how they are to be taken.

18 Barthes, '. . . That old thing, art . . .', 202. I am not applying any particular category to Ruscha's work such as 'pop' or 'conceptualism'. I am more interested in Barthes' perspicuous understanding of the mood of image making at a particular moment.

19 Of course there are ways of reading Heidegger and Adorno together in productive and thought-provoking ways. In relation to my thoughts on Ruscha, I have found Ute Guzzoni's essay particularly insightful. See '"Were speculation about the state of reconciliation permissible . . .": Reflections on the Relation between human beings and things in Adorno and Heidegger', in Iain Macdonald and Krzystof Ziarek, eds, *Adorno and Heidegger: Philosophical Questions*, 2008, 124–37.

20 There is a recent collection of essays that begins to explore the issue of facticity with Heidegger's early writings on the topic as its point of departure. See François Raffoul and Eric Sean Nelson, eds, *Rethinking Facticity*, New York, 2008. In this chapter I have relied primarily on Heidegger's own writings, in particular *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, Albany, NY, 1996, and two early lecture courses, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz, Bloomington, IN, 2001, and *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans. John van Buren, Bloomington, IN, 1999.

21 See Giorgio Agamben, 'The passion of facticity', in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed and trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford, CA, 1999, 188–9.

22 These sundry lists of things are also ubiquitous in the writings of Jean-Luc Nancy, reflecting his understanding that 'the time of modernity is followed by the time of things'.

23 Heidegger sometimes uses the phrase 'factical life' instead of facticity.

24 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 135.

25 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Cambridge, 1979, 72.

26 Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 36–7.

27 Cavell, 'What becomes of things on film?', in Cavell, *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes*, Chicago, IL, 1988, 174–7.

28 I mention clothing because Ruscha's *Babycakes* is placed strategically under his chin in such a way that the pink bow that binds the book also functions as his bowtie.

29 Siri Engberg, *Edward Ruscha: Editions, 1959–99: Catalogue raisonné*, vol. 2, Minneapolis, MN, 1999, 32–3.

30 Mansoor, 'Ed Ruscha's one-way street', 130–2. Mansoor does a nice job of describing the condition of skimming over the surface that is evidenced in *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*.

31 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 137.

32 Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected Problems of 'Logic'*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer, Bloomington, IN, 1994, 140.

33 Martin Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker, Bloomington, IN, 1995, 69.

34 Foster, Krauss, Buchloh and Bois, *Art since 1900*, 507.

35 Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 107: 'when a new medium is discovered it generates new instances, it doesn't merely make them possible, but calls for them, as if what is discovered is indeed something more than a single work can convey.'

36 Wall, '"Marks of indifference"', 43.

37 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §134, 345.

38 There are passages in Heidegger where the everyday is not merely fallen and 'inauthentic', and thus meant to be transcended in 'authentic' ways, but is the absolute condition for being-in-the-world that can be modified but never transcended. Giorgio Agamben, Simon Critchley, and particularly Jean-Luc Nancy are attentive to these issues in their readings of Heidegger. Thus when we hear Wall describe Ruscha in terms of the Everyman we should keep in mind that for Heidegger, 'The ''*every-one*'' has to do with something definite and positive – it is not only a phenomenon of fallenness, but as such also a how of factical Dasein.' See Heidegger, *Ontology*, 14.

39 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 134.

40 Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 87–8. The most extensive treatment of boredom is found in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. For example see, 137: 'boredom takes us back to the point where all and everything appears indifferent to us.'

41 Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 175–6.

42 Thierry de Duve, 'Bernd and Hilla Becher or monumentary photography', in de Duve, *Bernd and Hilla Becher: Basic Forms*, New York, 1999, 15–16. De Duve sees their photographs as a lesson in impersonal or vernacular aesthetics. 'It is to learn to read difference in composition, rhythm, and formal solutions where an ordinarily distracted eye would see only indifference and standardization.' He goes on to note that their work demonstrates a 'lucid innocence'.

43 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §29 and §68.

44 Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 89–94.

45 David Bourdon, 'Ruscha as publisher', in Schwartz, *Leave any Information*, 43. The passage continues as follows: 'All I was after was that store-front plane,' he says. 'It's like a Western town in a way. A store-front plane of a Western town is just paper, and everything behind it is just nothing.'

46 Jeff Wall, '''Marks of indifference''', 43.

47 Robert Smithson, 'Art through the camera's eye', in Fogle, *The Last Picture Show*, 105. I hesitate to mention Smithson in this context as this 'greyness' is of a piece with his understanding of the camera as an 'entropic machine'. The issue of 'greyness' comes to the fore in Smithson's 'A tour of the monuments of Passaic, New Jersey (1967)', (in Jack Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Berkeley, CA, 1996, 74) in his tale of the 'sandbox monument', where the box is divided into high contrast black and white sand that is then mixed into an undifferentiated grey that can never be subsequently 'unmixed'.

48 John Coplans, 'Concerning various small fires: Ed Ruscha Discusses his perplexing publications', in Schwartz, *Leave any Information*, 25.

49 Ruscha's *A Few Palm Trees* (1971) also contains sixty-four pages, with only fourteen illustrations.

50 Most of his books are 17.7 × 13.9 cm. Their depth varies but one would never characterize them as hefty.

51 See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Minneapolis, MN, 1996, 174.

52 I borrow the phrase 'outbreaks of spacing' from John Sallis, *Spacings – of Reason and Imagination in Texts of Kant, Fichte, Hegel*, Chicago, ILK, 1987, v.

53 Cavell, 'What becomes of things on film?', 175. In this passage Cavell is referring to Keaton's acting in *The General*, although I think this description is meant to apply as a whole to his species of comedy.

54 Coplans, 'Concerning various small fires', 23.

55 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 345.

56 Nancy, Agamben, Critchley, and Butler tend to see the 'fallen' ordinary in a less negative light, and thus try to shift the air of the exceptional, great, heroic and tragic in Heidegger's vocabulary of 'authenticity', 'resoluteness' and 'readiness' towards a more 'everyday' receptive and open disclosure of the world. See for example Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The decision of existence', in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes and Others, Stanford, CA, 1993, 82–109. The last phrase comes from Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, New York, 2005, 105.

57 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 137.

57 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 137.

59 Cavell, 'What becomes of things on film?', 174–7; Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, Oxford, 1979, 452; Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Cambridge, MA, 1971, 36–7. 'Absorbing skepticism', is from 'What becomes of things on film/', 177; and '[Keaton's] refinement . . . .' is from *The Claim of Reason*, 452. To be clear, Cavell never uses the word 'deadpan' in his discussions of Buster Keaton.

60 Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, London, 2007, 78; and 'Originary Inauthenticity – On Heidegger's Sein und Zeit', in Steven Levine, ed., *On Heidegger's Being and Time: Simon Critchley and Reiner Schurmann*, London, 2008, 142.

61 Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 37.

62 Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 429–30.

63 Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 452.

64 Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 173–5. We can move through this trajectory by sequentially unfolding and folding the individual segments of the accordion that are the same dimensions of the book page (17.7 × 13.9 cm), but we still need to unfurl the band in its entirety to get the full sweep of its expansive trajectory.

65 Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, 'Preface', *Learning from Las Vegas*, Cambridge, MA, 1972, xi. A similar thought is raised by Heidegger in his valorization of Greek 'apprehension' over modern representing and subjectivism in

Heidegger, 'The age of the world picture', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, New York, 1977, 131.

66 Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 36–7, and 'What becomes of things on film?', 175.

67 This contrast is made in Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 57.

68 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, San Francisco, CA, 1962, § 61.

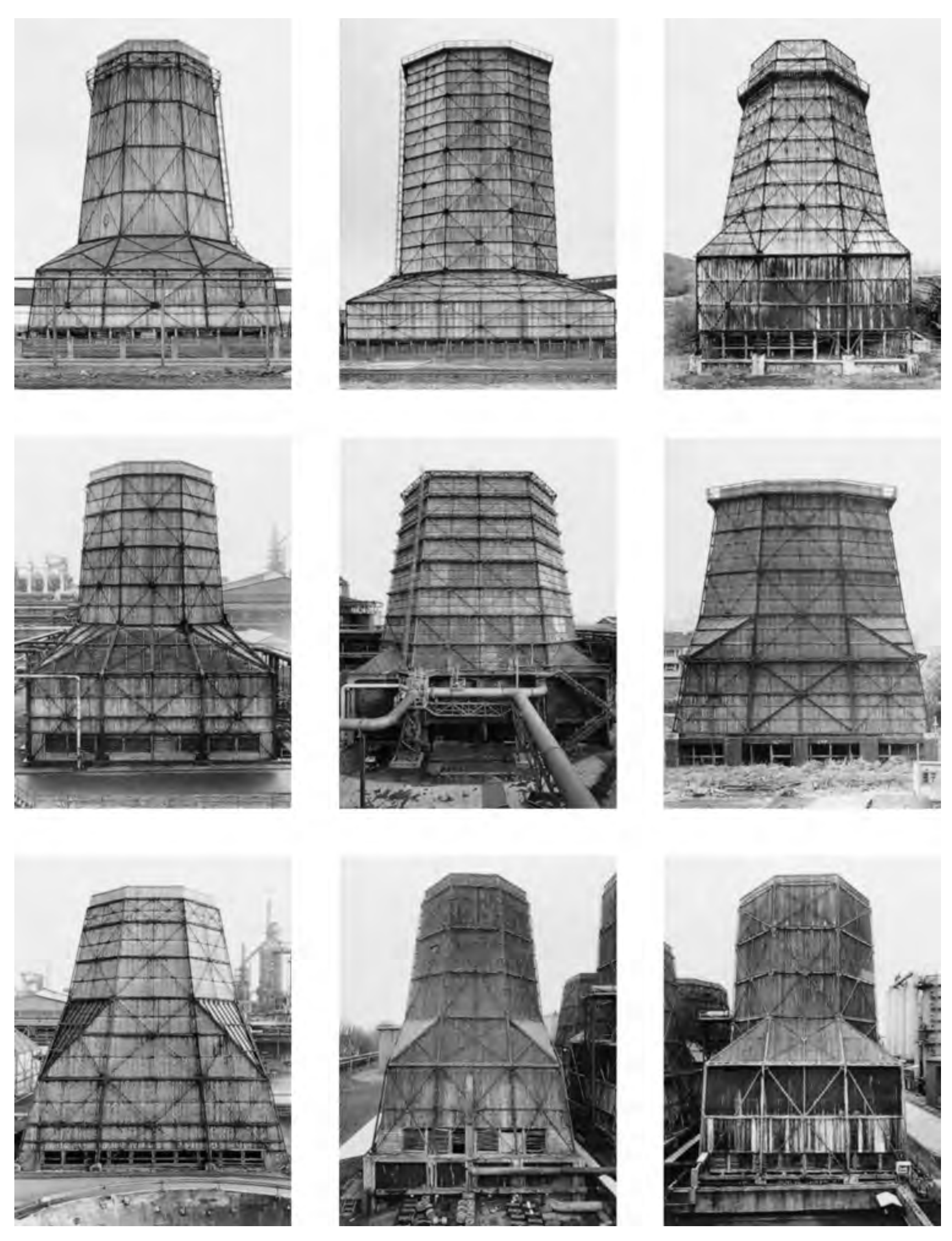
69 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 137.

70 Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 145.

71 Martin Heidegger, 'What is metaphysics?', in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, Cambridge, MA, 1998, 88, 93.

72 Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 452; Ruscha, *Leave any Information*, 245.

73 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett, Minneapolis, MN, 1998, 18.



1 Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Cooling Towers, 1967–1993*, 2003. Nine black and white photographs, 173.36 × 142.88 cm. Photo: Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery.

4

SUBJECT, OBJECT, MIMESIS: THE AESTHETIC WORLD OF THE BECHERS' PHOTOGRAPHY

SARAH E. JAMES

The structures in *Coal Bunkers* (plate 2) are redolent of a strange industrial family posing for their portraits. Their surfaces are bleached yet steeped in a dirty carbon patina, intersected by zigzagging stairwells, structural supports and sad vernacular flying buttresses. Broken windows and empty tracks testify to their dereliction, and the dimensionless, featureless sky, universalized by the camera, frames their type – like specimens pinned onto card, or anti-monuments. This grid of images is just one in hundreds of similar examples that belong to Bernd and Hilla Bechers' vast photographic project. Begun in 1959 and coming to prominence in the 1970s, the Bechers' work exists encyclopedically as a vast archive of typological grids of anonymous industrial architecture. For almost fifty years, the Bechers took standardized black and white photographs of industrial forms in Europe and America, from gasometers to grain elevators, factory facades and water towers (plates 1, and 3–5).[1] An important impulse within their work is found in their aim to record the structures of a rapidly declining industrial era before they were lost for ever.[2] Their practice shares some affinities with industrial archaeology in their compilation of an immense archive of industrial structures, a visual library of a disappearing industrial heritage. However, although the forms the Bechers depict are clearly epochal, they are not illustrative of the architecture of a specific author, moment or geographical region.

Above all else, the photographic world of the Bechers is committed to *objectivity*. Their consistent, arguably impossible, aim has been to evacuate their own subjectivity from the work, to remove themselves as expressive agents as much as is humanly possible from the photographic act. This difficult and disciplined form of expression is achieved in the strict adoption of a constant, straight, composition, unchanged over nearly half a century. All of their photographs are taken, when possible, from a height half that of the object, with a wide-angle lens, presenting the object frontally – a perspective that causes the horizon to recede and the surroundings to become more panoramic – giving the impression of distancing the object from its background, yet planting it firmly on the ground, and removing any sense of comparative scale. From 1961 they used a 13 × 18 cm plate camera, and after that a modern large format camera, to capture the details of their subjects with precision. The structures are shown tightly framed, photographed on spring or autumn mornings under



2 Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Gas Tanks, 1963–1997*, 2003. Sixteen black and white photographs, 193.04 × 233.68 cm. Photo: Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery.

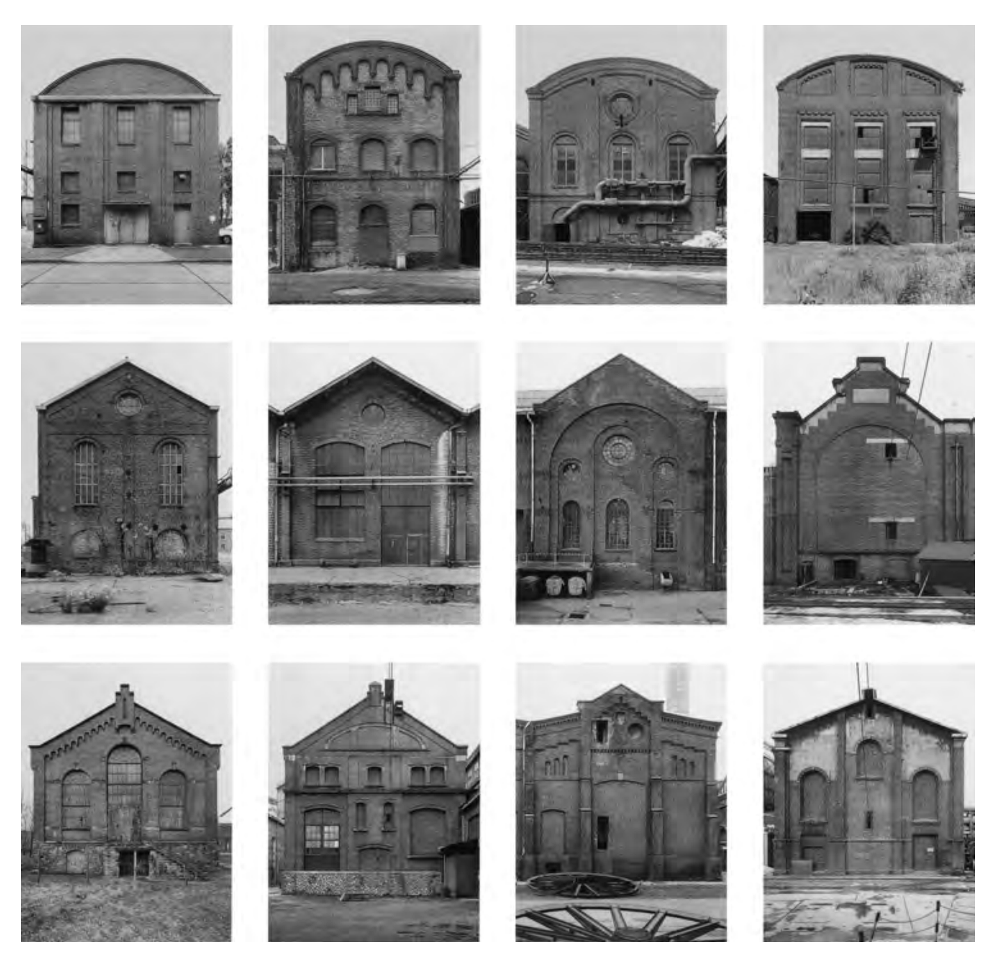
uniformly overcast skies in order to minimize shadows. There is less nostalgia, or feeling of potential, than we find in Eugene Atget's deserted Parisian streets, less psychology than in August Sander's portraits, and a more clinical photographic world of industrial buildings than was recorded by Albert Renger-Patzsch. The Bechers hope to achieve an impersonal aesthetic by presenting their object mutely, without implicating it in their own vision. As Hilla Becher has stated, 'you have to be honest with your object to make sure that you do not destroy it with your subjectivity, and yet remain involved at the same time.'[3] Their banishing of individual subjectivity is heightened in the act of their artistic collaboration, whereby, as in Bertholt Brecht's poem, 'Reader for Those Who Live in Cities', the subjective 'I' of the artist dissolves into the more generic 'We'.[4] The objectivity of the Bechers' photography is further developed through the avoidance of human subjects. As if following Walter Benjamin's lament that 'to do without people is for photography the most impossible of renunciations,' their consistently depopulated photographs accept precisely this burden.[5] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has argued that in contemporary photographic practice the exclusion of figures and faces has now become a photographic strategy as significant as their traditional inclusion had once been.[6] Buchloch perceives this photographic refusal of the subject, understood as a denial of the social, as 'potentially renewing the photographic medium of the picturesque; its elimination of social reality, confirming a ''melancholic complicity'', and engaging in a



3 Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Grain Elevators, 1982–2002*, 2003. Fifteen black and white photographs, 173.36 × 239.4 cm. Photo: Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery.

very picturesque abandonment and social passivity'.[7] However, the Bechers' work does not withdraw from the political into the picturesque, and their aesthetic world is fundamentally social.

In the Bechers' photography, the situation of the speaking subject is rejected in favour of the more generic statement or archive. The immense scope of the Bechers' project abstracts the objects they depict and seems to eclipse the artists behind it. Their work relies on the conventions of photography, which provide their system, and it is this system and archival impulse that defines their oeuvre. The objects photographed are grouped together in grids, defined by the similarity of their structures. This system was set in place around 1966, when they decided on typologies of sets of nine and started to fully systematize types. They first used the term typology as the subtitle for their 1969 book *Anonymous Sculptures*.[8] Although the number of images contained in the different grids alters, the typological presentation of their work is adhered to both in the book-format of their photography and when they exhibit it.[9] The typological arrangement of their photographs enables the viewer to sense the similarities between each and the emergence of a generic type, whilst simultaneously registering all of the differences between the structures and their eccentric characteristics. For example, in the *Cooling Towers* (plate 6) series we are presented with a group of similar geometric three-dimensional forms, past sculptures of modernity, evoking deserted urban temples. The forms share fragile exteriors, all have three sides



4 Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Industrial Facades, 1967–1992*, 2003. Twelve black and white photographs, 173.36 × 191.14 cm. Photo: Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery.

visible, and the corrugated iron skins of each are overlaid with the criss-cross geometric exoskeletons of their supporting architecture. Hilla Becher has commented that the essence of the objects under their lens can only be grasped and translated into the 'typical form' from the correct standpoint.[10] Their photography is not interested in specificities. Rather the Bechers minimize both temporal and geographical clues and provide a similar scale for all of their objects. In seeking to illuminate generic similarities and 'ideal types', they have suggested, 'the groups of photographs are more about similarities than distinctions . . . by looking at the photographs simultaneously, you store the knowledge of an ideal type, which can be used next time.'[11] The cumulative effect of the series defines our reading. Yet, although it increases our knowledge of the subject matter, the work paradoxically renders it increasingly abstract.

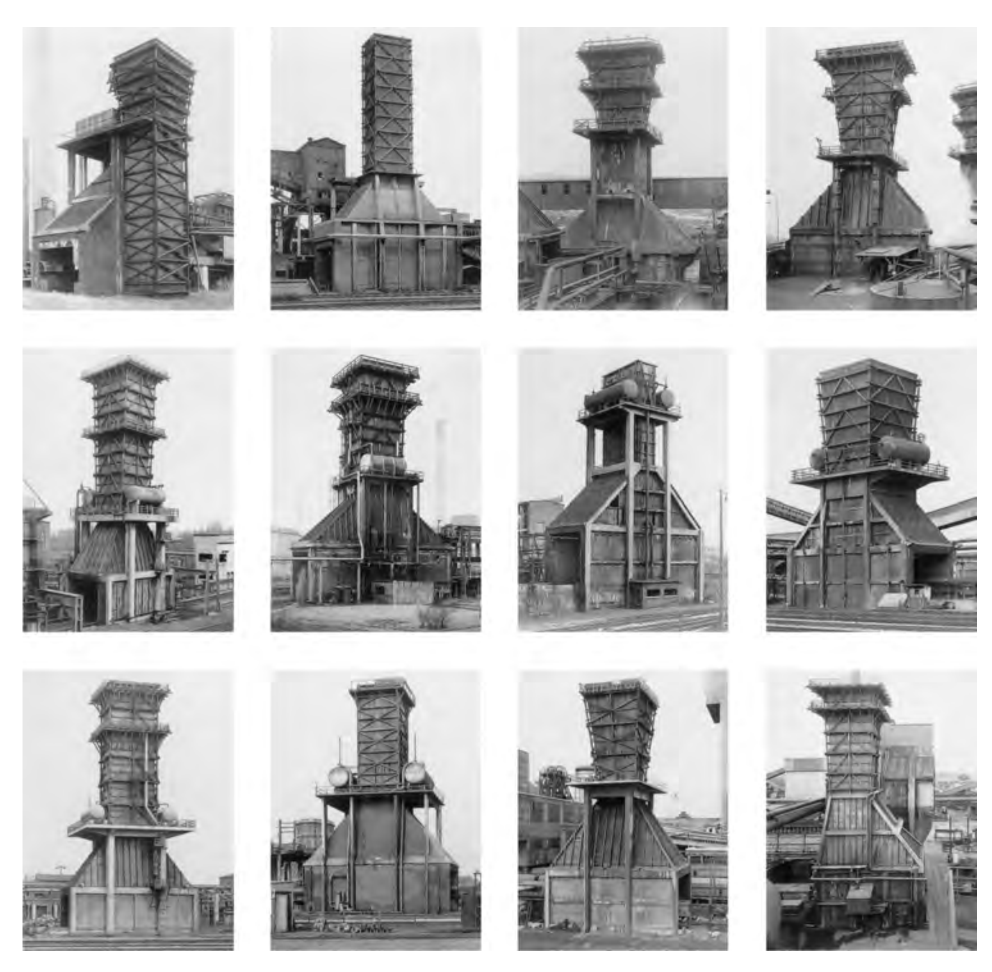
On one level the Bechers' oeuvre operates as an entirely photographic world of anonymous sculptural forms. Although true to their subjects in a documentary sense, their photographs of coal bunkers or water towers are not orthodox



5 Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Water Towers, 1967–1983*, 2003. Fifteen black and white photographs, 173.36 × 239.4 cm. Photo: Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery.

documentary images. There is no narrative. The everyday is abstracted, punctuated by seriality, and the structures are aestheticized, made reminiscent of beautiful relics or functionalist sculptures. That thirty years might separate two of their photographs is a fact obliterated by the similarities of the structures' anonymous scaffolding, and their identical, clinical, presentation (plates 7 and 8). That the Bechers' repetitive project spans nearly half a century gives their work a very unusual historical status, a complex temporal dynamic of its own. A single photograph by the Bechers looks lonely. Their work exists as both a pre-history to much of the critical photographic seriality that dominated the conceptualism of the 1960s and 1970s, and as a never-ending afterword to that period. Yet in its explicitly aesthetic dimension their work remains perplexingly incompatible with conceptualism's central objectives.

The complex aesthetic world of the Bechers and the ontological work that animates it has recently been the subject of investigations by both Blake Stimson and Michael Fried.[12] Although divergent in their agendas, and consequently in how they frame their readings, both Stimson and Fried have rightly argued that the Bechers' aesthetic is intrinsically linked to a way of seeing, and, consequently, to a way of knowing. Stimson's approach to the Bechers is determined by his reading of photography in the post-war period of the 1950s as 'social form', related to what he views as the preoccupation of the time with a 'new concept of man'.[13] For Stimson, photography in this decade enabled a reworking of the ideals of



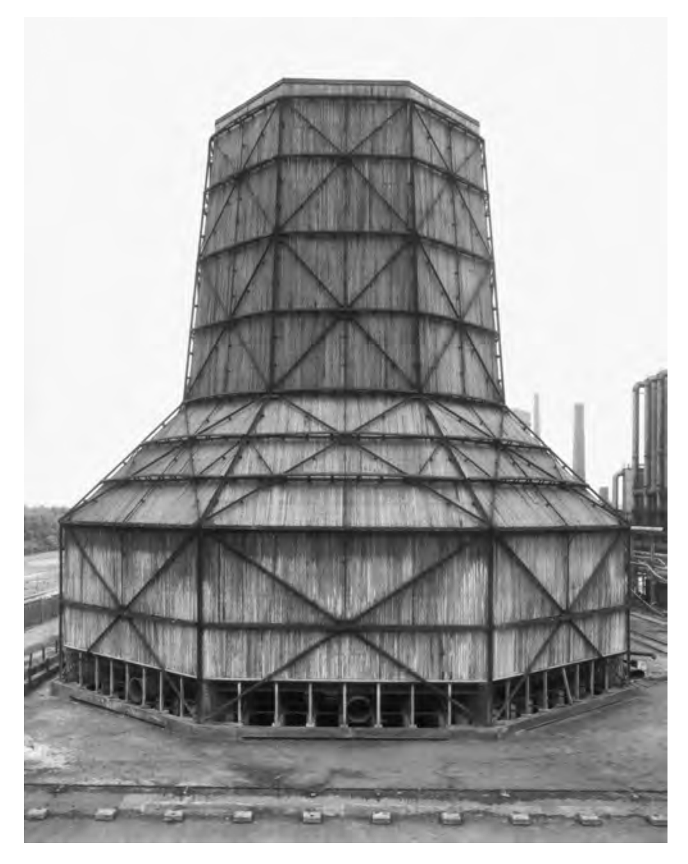
6 Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Coal Bunkers, 1967–1998*, 2003. Twelve black and white photographs, 173.36 × 191.14 cm. Photo: Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery.

the 'New Vision', and the relationship between the individual and the world that allowed for a rethinking of the concept of nation. By placing the Bechers' project alongside Edward Steichen's *The Family of Man* exhibition of 1955 and Robert Frank's *The Americans* (1958), Stimson proposes that all three can be understood as working to 'release the dream of nation' – of belonging and sovereignty – from its old civic constraints, enabling 'an opening to negotiation or conciliation with collectivism, a manner of tapping into collective expression and identification in a manner that shared in its recognizable affective force while still effectively tempering its potential for political violence'.[14] Although inattentive to the different cultural contexts of these American and German practices, for Stimson, seriality is central in all three of his examples, opening up new possibilities for social form. It does so, he argues, because the separation of frames that defines serial photography does not allow each to be displaced by the next in a narrative or temporal structure, and instead generates tensions between the general and particular, distance and proximity. This serial form consequently produces a

'photography qua photography' that represents its own autonomous place, stance, and identity in the world.

The Bechers' photography is presented by Stimson as dislodging earlier modernist political ideals, while delighting in some of their utopian impulses. From this perspective, the Bechers' project can be understood as proffering its own system of value, and thereby a distinctive form of autonomy and a model of sociality. The experience of their work is realized as 'satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) in the object without any specific individual aim or instrumental purpose being satisfied (or frustrated), without any notion of individual interest or collective will'.[15] It is this that makes the experience of the Bechers' work generalized and universal, and, for Stimson, a kind of 'neo-Kantian judgment made melancholy, a fully developed archive structured around an absent ideal'.[16] He suggests that the Bechers' industrial photography thus deploys the original Enlightenment promise of aesthetics: the ability to judge without interest.[17] In order to analyse the rhythms and repetitions of the Bechers' photography, Stimson considers the 'grammar' of their work as 'embodied expression' and 'a symptom of a social relation'.[18] The 'photographic comportment' of the Bechers is, he insists, 'a mode of being in, or perhaps better, a mode of being *with* the world more than it is a mode of representing it'.[19] Stimson concludes with reference to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and the philosopher's suggestion that one should respond to the experience of knowledge as abstraction 'not so much in purging the individual of an immediate, sensuous mode of apprehension, and making him into a substance that is an object of thought and that thinks, but rather in just the opposite, in freeing determinate thoughts from their fixity'.[20] This great modernist aim, Stimson claims, is located in the Bechers' serial photography, which frees embodiment from self-consciousness and in so doing, expresses a new form of political subjectivity.[21]

Like Stimson, Fried sees the Bechers' work as engaged not simply in a mode of apprehension, but in a rather more comparative and intellectually active kind of seeing. If Stimson is largely preoccupied with the subject-experience produced by the Bechers' photography, Fried is primarily concerned with the philosophical status of the object in their work. Fried suggests that the ontological originality of their project lies in its typologizing approach and the inseparability of similarity and difference in their photography – the acknowledgement of the simultaneous relations of resemblance and difference between the diverse structures that they photograph. Comparing their photography's relationship to the objects depicted with his own reading of minimalist objecthood, Fried argues that a different kind of objecthood is in play here. Like Stimson, in theorizing the aesthetic experiences contained within the Bechers' photography, Fried looks to Hegel, but not to his phenomenological writings. For Fried it is the philosopher's *Science of Logic* that becomes central.[22] Relying heavily upon Robert Pippin's reading of Hegel, Fried proposes that the Bechers' work can be illuminated by an appeal to Hegel's distinction between the notions of the 'genuine' or 'true' infinite, and the 'spurious' or 'bad' infinite.[23] What is at stake in this distinction, Fried suggests, is how to 'specify the finitude or individuality of objects in a way that does not simply contrast all the characteristics that a particular object allegedly possesses with all other possible characteristics that it does not'.[24] Therefore, it becomes possible to think of the Bechers' photography



7 Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Cooling Tower*, Rheim/Moers, Ruhrgebiet, Germany, 1963. Black and white photograph, 50 × 60 cm. Photo: Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery.

as aiming not to represent *the* ground or field against which the photographed objects in question stand out but, more modestly, the 'making intuitable of the conditions of their intelligibility both as the types of objects they instantiate – water towers, cooling towers, gasometers, winding towers, and so on – and as the particular instance of those types that the viewer is invited to recognize them as being'.[25] In other words, in creating their typologizing system, the Bechers remove each object from the spurious infinity of all objects in the world and give them specificity. At the same time, Fried stresses, the internally contrastive nature of their system means that each object is compared with the others, positively inviting spontaneous and structured comparisons. This way of comprehending becomes Hegelian because, like Hegel, the Bechers make clear that any attempt to identify or differentiate an essence is always necessarily indeterminate. The incompleteness of their ever-extending archive is an example of what Hegel called a 'genuine infinity', while the objects of the Bechers' typologies can be said to exemplify 'good objecthood'.[26] If the work of art is seen *sub specie aeternitatis* ('from the perspective of the eternal'), and the everyday object is seen from 'out of their midst', then the manner of beholding that



8 Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Cooling Tower*, Dortmund, Ruhrgebiet, Germany, 1993. Black and white photograph, 50 × 60 cm. Photo: Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery.

the Bechers' photography instigates sees the objects from the outside, but in such a way that they have the whole world as a background. With the aid of Wittgenstein's pre-*Tractatus* notebooks of 1916, Fried suggests that this kind of beholding involves the consideration of varieties of 'objecthood, worldhood and logical space that have nothing esthetic about them, in the traditional sense of the word'.[27]

If for Stimson the aesthetic experience of the Bechers' photography is one that grounds the beholder *in* and *with* the world, and ultimately articulates an archetypal *ur*-aesthetics, for Fried it engenders a seeing of objects 'from the outside', instead of from out of their midst, in relation to logical space as a whole. For Fried this is closer to what he calls elsewhere an 'aesthetics without aesthetics'.[28] Both accounts make clear that the objective character of the Bechers' photography, and the mode of seeing that their work instigates, enables their project to be both aesthetic and ethical. Yet on its own, neither account seems quite complete, focused as they both are primarily on subjecthood and objecthood, respectively. In what follows, I want to bring together their respective examinations of the subject and object within the aesthetic experience of the

Bechers' practice. Building on Stimson's and Fried's readings, I want to suggest that the aesthetic thought of Theodor W. Adorno, and particularly his concept of mimesis, provides a productive conceptual framework from which to interrogate and transcend this separation of subject and object positions within the Bechers' photographic world.

Crucially, a consideration of Adorno's philosophy serves to draw attention to the fact that there is a marked absence in both Stimson's and Fried's accounts – albeit to a lesser degree in Stimson's – of any extended engagement with the specifically German historical character of the Bechers' photography and the aesthetic experience it generates. There is something historically significant about the Bechers' work, and the ways in which this impacts upon the form of subjectivity and objecthood articulated in their photography has yet to be fully clarified. The historical condition of their photography is simply omitted from Fried's account, and although Stimson productively situates their work in the post-war period and the 'end of ideologies' debates that coloured the 1950s, his international approach fails to examine fully the culturally specific experience of Germany throughout that decade. Adorno was one of Germany's most important post-war philosophers and in his late writings, which are contemporaneous with the beginnings of the Bechers' typological project, one is granted both a valuable insight into a critical juncture in German history, and a crucial framework for thinking through the aesthetic experience contained within their photography. For here Adorno attempts to reformulate aesthetics after the decline of modernism, the rise of Fascism, the spread of capitalism and the catastrophe of the Holocaust.[29]

While many critics have rightly drawn parallels between the work of the Bechers and their modernist *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) forbears, the fact that the Bechers' oeuvre is also both strongly a response to, and a product of, the post-war period in West Germany is too rarely noted. The Bechers' photography is underwritten by their self-conscious rejection of the idea of art's political or ideological function.[30] They have stated frequently that their photography would not have been possible were it ideological. Hilla Becher has commented, 'For me, photography is by its very nature free of ideology. Photography with ideology falls to pieces.'[31] In the vernacular subject of past and anonymous industry, the Bechers believed that they had found a world as free of ideology as possible. Crucially, their subject was not Germany's industrial heritage (which would necessarily have brought with it the more problematic burden of nationalism), but an anonymous and international architecture. The politics of their consistent rejection of ideology can only be understood in the specific cultural context also addressed by Adorno. One of the most striking characteristics of this post-war period was the depoliticization of German culture and society. The 1950s, when the Bechers began their collaborative photographic endeavour, have become known for many as a 'dormant' and materialist decade in the Federal Republic's history, a time of conservative rehabilitation characterized by political sobriety and a rejection of ideologies.[32] After the experience of Nazism, the destruction of the war and military occupation, the dominant mood in West Germany was one of disillusionment and mistrust, resignation and disinterest in politics. As Frank Biess has stated, 'in the first post-war decade, West Germans sought to confront the consequences of Nazi ideological warfare within a distinctly de-ideologized

and depoliticized framework.'[33] Konrad Adenauer's government championed the westernization of the new state and, embracing the rampant Americanization of German society, celebrated the birth of the consumer era and the *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle). Because security and prosperity were the main objectives of the state, anti-communism and economic stability became its two only ideological creeds – 'a sort of *ersatz-ideology*, for keeping together a basically apolitical population that [had] lost a sense of common political tradition on which consensus could be founded'.[34] In the 1950s, West Germany was not alone, however, in its attempt to move beyond ideologies. As Stimson has stressed, intellectuals in the rest of Europe and America were also proclaiming the end of ideologies.[35] In Germany though, this rejection of ideology was more nuanced. As Martin Kolinsky and William E. Paterson have argued, the trauma of the war and the experience of fascism 'produced a political narcosis which not only resulted in an avoidance of, and withdrawal from, questions and problems involving the past and extremism, but also from political conflict, controversy and commitment in general'.[36] As a result, throughout the 1950s and the early 1960s West German society was dominated by a pragmatic pluralism and a deep-seated fear of the political. As in the social sphere, in the cultural realm 'ideology was an ill-omened word, associated with National Socialism, Stalinism and East Germany'.[37] For example, West German literature of the 1950s possessed a political dimension only in the sense of being unwaveringly anti-fascist, while often embracing an apolitical existentialism and modest realism. Hans Meyer has aptly characterized such early post-war literature as an 'ideology of anti-ideology' ('*Ideologie der Ideologiefeindschaft*').[38]

On first inspection, then, the Bechers' refusal of ideology appears to reflect the same sentiments as popular and intellectual currents in post-war West Germany, an 'ideology of anti-ideology'. However, their work, in which they sought obsessively to banish the political, is not coloured by a simplistic apolitical existentialism, or by any sceptical assertions about the end of politics. Instead they recognize, as Adorno argued, that in a culture resurrected after catastrophe, 'art has taken on an ideological aspect by its mere existence.'[39] According to Adorno, the most fundamental form of ideology, serving perhaps as a kind of meta-theory of ideology, is 'identity' itself, involving the mindless repetition of sameness without reflection.[40] If ideologies transform sentiment into significance through symbolism, metaphor and analogy, it is exactly through the attempt to remove the self that the Bechers' photography seeks to reject ideology. In their epic project the Bechers pursue a commitment that could no longer be located in the individual or the masses, but that was nevertheless crucial to maintain if art were to justify its continued existence in a world for ever changed by Hitler's Fascism and the Holocaust. The Bechers are not necessarily picturing a post-ideological or pragmatic world. I want to suggest that in working against identity, what the Bechers' photography seeks is something closer to what Fredric Jameson has called the 'non-ideological' – the utopian moment at the centre of all ideology.[41]

The central paradox that lies at the core of the Bechers' practice is that their work is aesthetic, whilst almost refusing to be art. Indeed, in the German context of the 1950s and 1960s, their photography often wasn't perceived as art, but as the documentation and illustration of industrial archaeology, and many of their early

commissions came from the industrial world. The Bechers' deliberate refusal of 'artistic' photography can only be explained in light of the cultural taboo placed on artistic creation in Germany in the aftermath of the 1939–45 war and the catastrophe of the Holocaust, which initiated a retreat from the explicitly aesthetic, expressive and beautiful, and a movement towards documentary and realism. In examining the contemporary situation of art in Germany in the 1950s, Adorno believed that the essence of art as an autonomous sphere of value had become insufferable because of the increasingly rationalized world that had culminated in the horror of the Holocaust.[42] Because of this, he argued, 'art must turn against itself, in opposition to its own concept, and thus become uncertain of itself right to its innermost fibre.'[43] In the photography of the Bechers this uncertainty is both apparent and ever-present; the kind of aesthetic experience it harbours suggests the untenable character of art, its borderline existence.[44] The Bechers' photography is invested in the aesthetic because it offers an invaluable alternative to the political. Crucially however, their aesthetic is neither the picturesque nor the lofty domain of the sublime. Rather it originates in the least artistic world imaginable. Aware of the impossibility of beauty after Auschwitz, they displace the beautiful with the industrial. Adorno anticipates precisely such a transposition when he states that art must now be 'defined by its relation to what it is not. The specifically artistic in art must be derived concretely from its other; that alone would fulfill the demands of a materialistic-dialectical aesthetics.'[45] The Bechers' work proposes that artistic agency and aesthetic experience need another framework, and that such a basis might be found in industrial forms, in labour, and in history. The artists have stressed that the industrial world felt like an extension of their childhoods and part of their ancestry, that they already knew about the conditions and vocabulary of industry, and in their work became involved in its subculture and the people whose world it was. This is clearly reflected in their series of workers' framework houses in Siegen's industrial area (plate 9).[46] This vernacular subject and the style of their photographic depictions enable the beholder, via a process of 'determinate negation' (an immanent criticism that contrasts its subject with other subjects determined in ways in which it is not) to think their photography both aesthetically and anti-aesthetically at the same time.

At this critical moment in post-war German history Adorno also addressed the unfeasibility of aesthetics, rewriting its impossibility back into a new version of itself through a negative dialectical approach.[47] Adorno argued that the task that now fell to aesthetics was to foster the rational and concrete dissolution of conventional aesthetic categories in such a way as to release new truth content into these categories. A similar negative dialectic is enacted by the Bechers' archive: they refuse to give up photography's autonomy, and their systematized and abstract world of sculptural subjects affirms their attempt to offer art a weak promise of utopian transcendence. The Bechers do not reject the ideals of beauty and truth outright; in fact their photography attempts to redeem them – but only through forcing materialism upon metaphysics. In their work an aesthetic language is demanded, albeit one that is found in the foreign ornament and vernacular vocabulary of industry, rather than the traditional lexicon of art history. To talk in any detail about their images one must learn the language of



9 Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Framework Houses*, 1996. Fifteen black and white photographs, 173 × 239 cm. Photo: Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery.

industrial engineering: pithead towers, coke ovens, engine houses, gas compressors, central shafts, consolidation collieries, twin-strut frames, and steel headgear. Thus the Bechers put aesthetic experience to work. They make hermeneutics a process of labour, not transcendence, and traditional aesthetic concepts are pressed back into service dialectically.

The Bechers' rejection of the ideological and their refusal to depict the subject can be understood as a strategic refusal to participate in the photographic reification and ruin of subjectivity. Their reluctance to exert their artistic subjectivity, or to portray human subjects, can be understood as a reluctance to support the arrogance of individual vision or to make the individual human subject into a representative of either a collective type or a specific identity. The Bechers' oeuvre originates in the acknowledgement that the experience of the subject – and its experience of nature – is historically deformed. As if following Michel Foucault's warning that making historical analysis the discourse of the continuous, and making human consciousness the original subject of all historical development, are two sides of the same system of thought, the Bechers' refusal of the centred subject's authorial voice goes hand-in-hand with their rejection of a documentary photography that might reconstruct history or attempt to construct history itself.[48] It is as if in their objective style and their typologizing, systematizing vision, they are registering the suspension of pre-existing forms of continuity and synthesis that are accepted without question, demonstrating through their practice that such systems of interpretation do not come about

by themselves, but are always the result of a construction, the rules of which can be excavated.

The Bechers anthropomorphize and transform the industrial structures under their camera's lens into objects, into *things*. Like Karl Blosslfeldt's botanical specimens, these cultural-historical artefacts are almost presented as if they were natural forms. This is a process that might initially seem ideologically dubious, since it is the assimilation of culture to nature that underlies the formation of ideology; as a result, it is normally its inverse that is posited, the dissolution of the natural into the cultural, and the flat rejection of nature. However, an analogous process plays a central role in Benjamin's philosophy – his 'dialectics at a standstill' – which Adorno in turn described as a 'natural history'.[49] Adorno claims that the Benjaminian 'essay as form' depended upon the philosopher's astute ability to regard historical 'moments', 'manifestations of the objective spirit', and 'culture' as though they were natural.[50] Similarly, the Bechers' photography formalizes reification, depicting sites of human labour, monuments of the industrial revolution, and freezing these past gestures of labour – literally 'thingifying' them. In so doing, their photography operates as a visual pun on the abstraction of labour's use value and the commodity fetishism that replaces inter-human relationships with relationships between humans and things. In this way their work echoes Benjamin's appropriation of the fetishism of commodities, a strategy he pursues because, as Adorno asserts, 'everything must metamorphose into a thing in order to break the catastrophic spell of things.'[51] In the Bechers' series of near-identical images the historical becomes natural, but at the same time their archive alternates between the general and the particular, the image and the *thing*, between difference and similarity.

Hence it is not the form of political subjectivity or the objecthood generated by the Bechers' work, taken on its own, that is central to their photography, but the dialectical experience that takes place between them. Adorno attempted to think just such an experience in his concept of mimesis, defined as 'the non-conceptual affinity of a subjective creation with its objective and unposited other'.[52] Adorno turns to this concept in order to overcome the hierarchy between the subject and object, in which subjective reason dominates the object.[53] Adorno's 'non-identitarian' thinking, by contrast, resists the compulsion to identification inherent in all conceptual thought, its relentless subsumption of particulars under generalizing concepts, by continual self-reflection upon the inadequacy of such thought, approaching truth negatively. His aesthetic theory is a model of such thinking in action. Adorno's negative, and always incomplete, dialectic begins, in opposition to Hegel's, with the object rather than the subject, and attempts, in Tom Huhn's words, to 'follow, intellectually and experientially, the shape of certain objects, namely those that themselves seem irreducible to thoughts alone'.[54]

Huhn's reading of Adorno's conception of mimesis situates it in relation to the latter's critique of subjectivity, and in this light we can understand it as the central term in his conception of the dialectical relations between subjectivity and its objects. In Adorno's account, subjectivity's development is a dialectical, historical process, and mimesis is the projection and reprojection of subjectivity. It is not the copying or imitation of what has been, but the

continuity, from reflection to reflection, of the multiple aspects and movements of subjective possibility.[55] As Huhn suggests, 'the dialectical advantage of objectifying thought – like that of reifying subjectivity – is . . . not to revivify these ossified objects', but instead, 'to allow subjectivity to become, reflectively, something else in response to them'.[56] For Hegel, the artwork's inescapable objecthood constrains purely subjective experience and the artwork consequently becomes a mimetic projection of 'where subjectivity might most productively flounder'.[57] Nonetheless, for the subject to assimilate itself to the object requires, paradoxically, an active subject. Consequently, as Peter Osborne stresses, 'In a work of art, the mimetic moment dialectically interpenetrates the rational, constructive moment (without ultimately being reconciled with it) in such a way that it is expressed through it, while nonetheless, through its difference from it, acting as a criticism of it.'[58] Adorno argues that before the first image was produced, it was preceded by a mimetic act, the 'assimilation of the self to its other'.[59] Indeed, Adorno characterizes both art and mimesis in terms of 'comportment' (*Verhalten*) – a receptive mode of being and orienting oneself to the world – and states that 'art in its innermost essence is a comportment.'[60] It is a way of *doing*, rather than making.

As in Adorno's aesthetic thought, so in the Bechers' photography: subjectivity is extricated from organicist, expressivist and biographical notions, but not completely done away with.[61] The Bechers' work begins as a formal negativity; it occupies a classical conception of aesthetic experience of the object from within, provisionally accepting its methodological presuppositions, substantive premises, and truth-claims as its own. But their photography ultimately puts pressure on the premises and assertions of aesthetic experience. What underlies the aesthetics of the Bechers' photography is also the strategic dissolution of the hierarchy that defines the relationship between the subject and the object. Indeed, echoing Adorno's understanding of subject mediation, one might argue that the aesthetic experiences of the Bechers' photography are based upon the subject's active engagement with the object, and, specifically, with the role of the social totality within the object; an object that must be embedded in concrete, and historically specific, social existence. But their photography also elicits a productive floundering of the subject: their unfinished, incomplete photographic world invites reflection, subjective dissolution and reconstitution. In this light, the never-ending nature of the Bechers' work takes on a weightier significance, and we can further appreciate Fried's reading of their objecthood and Stimson's interpretation of the Bechers' photography as a sort of *ur-aesthetic* experience, not only because of the disinterestedness they cultivate, but because in their photography the subject is afforded a mimetic model which, like Adorno's understanding of aesthetic experience more generally, enacts 'the pitfalls of subjective becoming, of how to forestall becoming fixed and fixated, rigid and further bound up'.[62]

The 'grammar' of the Bechers' work can be understood as 'embodied expression', and the form of comportment or bearing toward the world that their photography generates can be thought of as mimetic because it attempts to objectify without reification, to express without expressing something. The Bechers' photography, as Stimson and Fried would agree, actively distances itself from making, and instead, is all about a way of *doing*. The 'continuity of reflection'

is what enables the beholder of the Bechers' photographic world to hold on to the memory of the ideal object in between every act of looking at the next. It is also what holds together the notion of an active and absent subject and an ideal but unachievable object. Thus, the subject positions produced in the Bechers' photography emerge through the object; political subjectivity and objecthood are realized only through each other. If the Bechers' work gestures towards the general, the ideal object and the absent subject, it constantly interrupts the possibility that they will ever be realized by reactivating their beholder to register difference, to look actively, to systematize. Seen in this light, it is the way that mimesis and construction dialectically combine in the production of the Bechers' work that enables their aesthetic experience to aspire, albeit negatively, to an autonomous truth.

Thus, the Bechers' photography can be understood as enabling us to construct another understanding of objectivity – one that is not immediately aligned with the construction of false histories and hidden ideologies. Rather it offers an objectivity that can be recast as something more fragile and discontinuous, something that is about a silent shared commonality, and something that might need to be protected. The aim of their work is comparative, drawn by the aesthetic language traced across their objects. And the beauty of their photography reveals itself as the product of persistent analysis. If morphology occupies a central place in their photography, it is not limited to the science of forms, but is closer to the branch of linguistics that studies patterns of word formation within and across languages, and attempts to formulate rules that model the knowledge of the speakers of those languages. Though it may appear easy to undercut the Bechers' aspiration towards objectivity by arguing that the highest forms of latent subjective expression can be found in the very distinctive aesthetic of their work, looking at it through the lens of Adorno's thought, one can argue that in mimetically evacuating their subjectivity, they deliberately make the subject perpetually present.

When the Bechers began their photographic project in Germany of the 1950s, a cultural prohibition against the subject was directly related to the post-Auschwitz cultural critique of the individual. However, autonomy – the power of self-reflection, and self-determination, what Adorno referred to as 'the single genuine power standing against the principle of Auschwitz' – was understood as equally crucial at this juncture.[63] The Bechers' anti-subjectivism can be thought of like Adorno's; it is driven by the idea that the true place of the subject in aesthetic experience is not to be characterized by its purification, 'still less in its creative mastery over this last and objective contingency, but instead in a violent eclipse of the subject itself, with which comes its simultaneous affirmation'.[64] The Bechers literally disappear into their photography. Just as objectivity is given an expressivity of its own, the act of removing themselves from their photographs, of removing all remnants of human subjects – and policing this in such an absolute manner – becomes somatic, physical, and real. It is a much more profound way of citing the subject. It is not, as Stimson argues, a conciliation with collectivism that their work initiates, but with the singular subject. The subject that simultaneously emerges is not the individual, but its ideal. The Bechers' reject the subject that Adorno sees as resulting from the narcissistically self-related cultivation of its 'being-for-itself', in favour of a

process of externalization and the dialectical assertion of an absent and ideal subject. Or, as Adorno called it, 'the moment of autonomy, freedom, and resistance that once, no matter how adulterated by ideology, resonated in the ideal of personality'.[65]

Both the 'good objecthood' that Fried finds in the Bechers' photography, and the 'comportment to the world' located by Stimson, are a result of the artists' mimetic attempt to redeem expression through the frail objectivity and historicity of *things*. In their avowedly objective photography, the Bechers' seek to redeem a metaphysical or 'emphatic' concept of truth from the context of idealist ontology. But the ideal of the camera's ability to depict truthfully, its power to represent absolutes, is redeemed precisely in its acknowledged failure to ever fully represent any truth. Each photograph within the Bechers' never-ending photographic archive exists as a dialectic image, emerging between the alienation of the object and the meaning it acquires on being viewed. Their photography underlines the fact that there can be no knowledge without a perspective from which it is gained. The Bechers' practice elaborates an aesthetic from below. In their desire to truthfully redeem the 'thingness' of the world, their photography enables the resurrection of a certain archaism – a moment where the subjective and the objective meet, and the mimesis of reification coexists with the mimetic resistance of reification.

Notes

I would like to thank the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for their generous support of my research, and Diarmuid Costello for the invaluable suggestions and advice he gave during the writing of this chapter.

1 The Bechers worked on this project collaboratively until Bernd Becher's death on 22 June 2007.

2 Bernd Becher first photographed industry in Siegen in 1957, taking photographs of industrial structures that he was planning to paint as he could not keep up with their demolition by drawing. Hilla Becher was also interested in industrial forms from early on in her career, and began taking industrial photographs in the 1950s.

3 Hilla Becher, quoted by James Lingwood in Marc Freidus, James Lingwood and Rod Slemmons, eds, *Typologies: Nine Contemporary Photographers*, Palo Alto, CA, 1991, 17.

4 See Bertolt Brecht, 'A reader for those who live in cities', in John Willett and Ralph Manheim, eds, *Bertolt Brecht Poems, 1913–1956*, London, 1976, 131.

5 Walter Benjamin, 'A short history of photography', in *One-Way Street, and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, London, 1979, 251.

6 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Residual resemblance: three notes on the ends of portraiture', in Melissa Feldman, ed., *Face-Off, the Portrait in Recent Art*, Philadelphia, PA, 1994, 62.

7 See Benjamin H. D., Buchloh, 'Struth's archive', in *Thomas Struth Photographs*, Chicago, IL, 1990, 9.

8 Katl Ruhrberg and Thomas Grochowiak, eds, *Anonyme Skulpturen, Formvergleiche Industrieller Bauten, Photos von Bernhard und Hilla Becher*, Düsseldorf, 1969.

9 Since the early 1960s their preferred presentational mode has been the grid. The prints (each measuring 16 × 12 inches or smaller) are arranged into groups of nine or sixteen. Occasionally larger scale photographs are displayed beside each other, and the gallery space defines the groupings.

10 Hilla Becher, quoted in Lynda Morris, ed., *Bernd und Hilla Becher, An Arts Council Exhibition*, London, 1974, n.p.

11 Hilla Becher, quoted in Morris, *Bernd und Hilla Becher*, n.p.

12 Blake Stimson, *The Pivot of the World: Photography and its Nation*, Cambridge, MA, 2006, and Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, New Haven and London, 2008.

13 Stimson, *The Pivot*, 14.

14 Stimson, *The Pivot*, 22.

15 Stimson, *The Pivot*, 166.

16 Stimson, *The Pivot*, 166.

17 Blake Stimson, 'The photographic comportment of the Bechers', lecture given at Tate Modern, 2003, n.p.

18 Stimson, *The Pivot*, 143.

19 Stimson, *The Pivot*, 167.

20 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, New York, 1979, 19–20.

21 Stimson, *The Pivot*, 174.

22 See G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller, New York, 1969.

23 See Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness*, Cambridge and New York, 1989.

24 Fried, *Why Photography Matters*, 324.

25 Fried, *Why Photography Matters*, 326.

26 Fried, *Why Photography Matters*, 328.

27 Fried, *Why Photography Matters*, 329.

28 Fried does not explicitly use the term 'aesthetics without aesthetics' in his book, but he did do so in his lecture 'To complete the world of things: on the Bechers' typologies', given at University College London, 1 December 2005.

29 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, London, 1997.

30 Strikingly, the Bechers are not alone in their rejection of ideology. Some of the most prominent German artists in this period have frequently discussed their rejection of ideology and its incompatibility with artistic practice. Most notable of these is Gerhard Richter, who has repeatedly claimed the importance of his practice being anti-ideological: 'I have become involved with thinking and acting without the help of an ideology . . . Ideologies seduce and exploit uncertainty, legitimise war.' Richter, quoted in Michael Danoff, 'Heterogeneity', *Gerhard Richter's Paintings*, London, 1988, 9–10.

31 Thierry de Duve, 'Bernd and Hilla Becher, or monumental photography', in de Duve, *Bernd und Hilla Becher: Basic Forms*, New York, 1992, 21.

32 Martin Kolinsky and William E. Paterson, eds, *Social and Political Movements in Western Europe*, London, 1976, 78.

33 Frank Biess, 'Survivors of totalitarianism: returning POWS and the reconstruction of masculine citizenship in West Germany, 1945–1955', in Hanna Schissler, ed., *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949–1968*, Princeton, NJ and Oxford, 2001, 73.

34 Kolinsky and Paterson, *Social and Political Movements*, 75.

35 For example, the American social scientist David Riesman. See Robert G. Moeller, *West Germany Under Construction: Politics, Society, and Culture in the Adenauer Era*, Ann Arbor, MI, 1997, 399.

36 Kolinsky and Paterson, *Social and Political Movements*, 75.

37 Richard Hinton Thomas and Keith Bullivant, eds, *Literature in Upheaval: West German Writers and the Challenge of the 1960s*, Manchester, 1974, 33.

38 Shelley Frisch, 'The turning down of the *Turning Point*: the politics of non-reception of exile literature in the Adenauer era', in Dieter Sevin, ed., *Die Resonanz des Exils: Gelungene und Misslungene Rezeption Deutschsprachiger Exilautoren*, Amsterdam, 1992, 208.

39 See Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 234.

40 See Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, London, 2005, 86.

41 See Slavoj Žižek's discussion of Frederic Jameson's non-utopia in Žižek, 'Multiculturalism, or, the cultural logic of late capitalism', *New Left Review*, 1, 225, September–October 1997, 28–51.

42 See Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Stanford, CA, 2002.

43 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 2.

44 See James Lingwood, 'The music of the blast furnaces: Bernhard and Hilla Becher in conversation with James Lingwood', in Susanne Lange, *Bernd and Hilla Becher: Life and Work*, trans. Jeremy Gaines, London, 2007, 194.

45 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 3.

46 See Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Fachwerkhäuser des Siegener Industriegebietes*, Munich, 1977.

47 Peter Osborne, 'Adorno and the metaphysics of modernism: the problem of a "postmodern" art', in Andrew Benjamin, ed., *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*, London, 1989, 24.

48 See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London, 1972.

49 Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson and Samuel Weber, Cambridge, MA, 1983, 233.

50 Adorno, *Prisms*, 233.

51 Adorno, *Prisms*, 233.

52 Adorno, quoted by Osborne in Benjamin, *Problems of Modernity*, 31.

53 Frederic Jameson is particularly concerned with the ambiguous status of the category, and concludes that mimesis should be understood as the substitute for the traditional subject–object relationship. See Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic*, London, 1990, 256. For a discussion of the role of mimesis in Adorno, see Isabelle Graw, 'Adorno is among us',

trans. James Gussen, in *Adorno: The Possibility of the Impossible*, Berlin, 2003, 13–28.

54 Tom Huhn 'Introduction: thoughts beside themselves', in Huhn, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, Cambridge, 2004, 5.

55 Huhn, *Cambridge Companion*, 7.

56 Hunh, *Cambridge Companion*, 5.

57 Huhn, *Cambridge Companion*, 7.

58 Osborne in Benjamin, *Problems of Modernity*, 32.

59 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 329.

60 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 42.

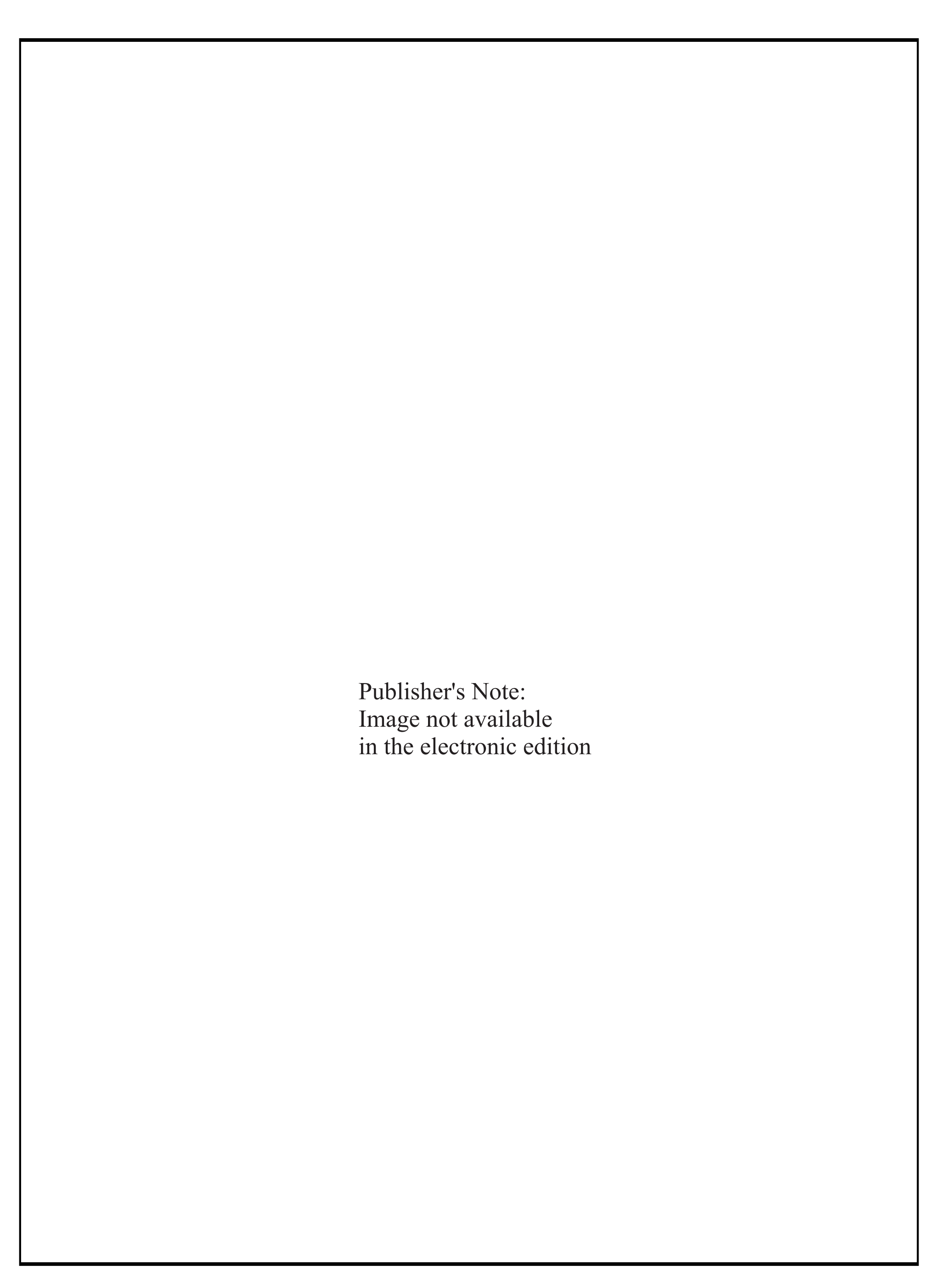
61 See Shierry Weber Nicholson, *Exact Imagination*, Cambridge, MA, 1997, 32.

62 Huhn, *Cambridge Companion*, 8.

63 Adorno, 'Education after Auschwitz', in Lydia Goehr, ed., *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, New York, 2005, 195.

64 Jameson, *Late Marxism*, 215.

65 See Adorno, 'Gloss on personality', in Goehr, *Critical Models*, 165.



1 Douglas Huebler, *Variable Piece # 105*, *London, 1972*, 1972. Photographic reproduction and printed text, dimensions variable. As printed in *Origin and Destination: Alighiero E Boetti, Douglas Huebler*, Brussels: Société des Exposition du Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, 1998. Photo: © 2009 Estate of Douglas Huebler/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

 ISBN: 978-1-444-33360-2

5

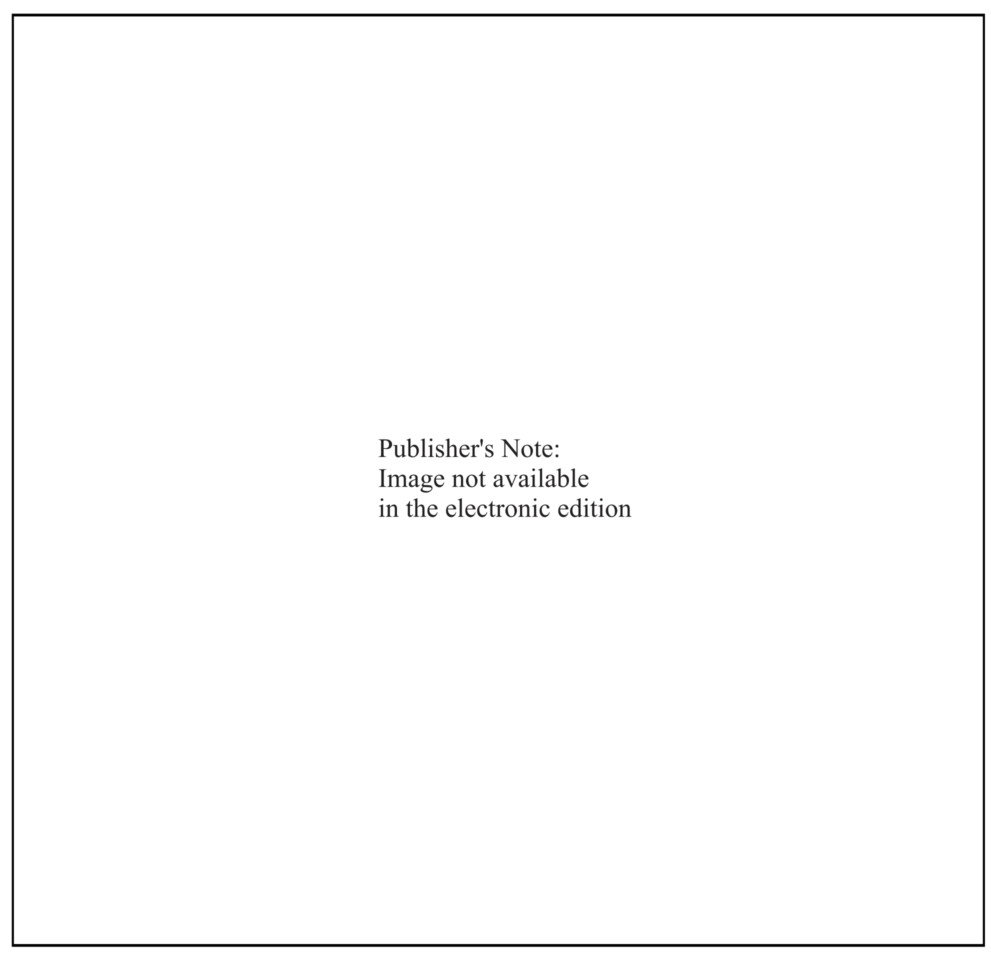
EXIT GHOST: DOUGLAS HUEBLER'S FACE VALUE

GORDON HUGHES

There is something more than a little ridiculous in the pairing of mannequins to people that Douglas Huebler presents us with in his 1972 *Variable Piece #105, London, 1972* (plate 2). All the more so given that the text accompanying this work asks us to believe what, to me at least, seems frankly unbelievable: after each mannequin was photographed, it was matched with another shot taken of the first random person encountered of the same gender. As proof of this claim, Huebler includes his contact sheet as part of the work – an inclusion that, of course, proves absolutely nothing: twenty seconds, twenty hours, or twenty days could have lapsed between the sequence of photographs for all this tells us. But given the resemblance – I'm almost tempted to say 'uncanny resemblance', but I'll get to that shortly – between most of the mannequins and their living counterparts, credibility as far as I am concerned is stretched well beyond the breaking point. Are we really supposed to believe that the shared appearance in the photographs of the woman and her dummy in the middle of the grid, where we see the same, slightly bizarre hairstyle repeated above and below, is sheer coincidence? Or, in another version of the work (see plate 1), claims for happenstance pure and simple are again cast in a dubious light when we see a coupling of blonde to blonde and brunette to brunette, each pair sharing more-or-less the same haircut and even facial features. Looking at these doubles, I doubt strongly that Huebler is really expecting us to take him at face value here.

Talking to a group of faculty and students in 1973 at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax, Canada, Huebler describes in some detail how he came to make *Variable Piece #105, London, 1972*:

> For several years I'd been interested in the different styles of mannequins in store windows, and, like a lot of things I do, I think about those things but I don't think very hard, and then one day sometime later it occurs to me, this is what I'll do. And so, after a couple of years of being interested in those things, it occurred to me that I would make photographs of mannequins in London. I mean, I happened to be in London and it occurred to me there, that I would make photographs and then photograph the next person I saw of the same sex. So I would snap off from the store window and then turn and shoot the next male or female depending on what the mannequin had been – to put the two kinds of realities into juxtaposition like that without intending to prove anything. Again, that's important to me. I'm not



2 Douglas Huebler, *Variable Piece # 105*, *London, 1972*, 1972. Photographic reproduction and printed text, dimensions variable. As printed in *Douglas Huebler 'Variable', etc.*, Limoges: F.R.A.C. Limousin, 1993. Photo: © 2009 Estate of Douglas Huebler/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

> trying to prove anything. It's kind of like setting the strategy and just doing that and seeing what I got.[1]

At first blush this appears to put to rest any doubts about the veracity of Huebler's system. Plain as day, he seems to tell us exactly how went about conceiving, establishing, and following his system, which he did, apparently, to the letter: 'it's kind of like setting the strategy and just doing that and seeing what I got'. But what, exactly, is Huebler's 'strategy'? The implication is that he works in a manner akin to Sol LeWitt's systems-based view of conceptual art, whereby 'all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair'.[2] Does Huebler therefore simply propose and set a system in motion, following it through to its clockwork conclusion in order to see what happens? Or could his 'strategy' be a little more sly perhaps – a little more strategically cunning or canny in precisely the manner suggested by his choice of

word, and in a way that the more obvious and mechanical connotations of the term 'system' do not carry? Could the photographs, in other words, function in such a way that they do not simply reiterate and support the linguistic statement, providing visual evidence, or proof, as to the work's proper execution, but on the contrary put the entire work, statement included, under pressure in ways that throw all claims to fidelity into question? Is it the system itself that is being tested, or the limits of our faith in that system?

Most jarring in Huebler's otherwise matter-of-fact description of *Variable Piece #105*, *London, 1972*, however, is the way he twice stresses that the photographs are not intended as proof, despite the obvious fact that the whole conceit of the contact sheet – or 'contact proof print' as it is significantly termed in the statement – is to provide exactly that: proof that the statement is good to its word ('without intending to prove anything. Again, that's important to me. I'm not trying to prove anything'). Similar candour regarding the known, even deliberate failure of photographic documentation to function as proof crops up time and again in interviews with Huebler: 'In the same sense that I don't care about specific appearance, I don't really care about precise or exhaustive documentation. The documents prove nothing.'[3] Further troubling to any viable claim the work might have to truth is that Huebler also casts doubt on the statement itself. Thus, shortly before his description of *Variable Piece #105*, *London, 1972*, Huebler slips in this slightly too offhand comment: 'You know, again, I can say anything I want in these statements. People can believe it or not.'[4] It's almost impossible to imagine Huebler saying this without being aware of how it recasts the performative function of the linguistic statements in his work from doing to *saying*. Maybe the statement is true; maybe it's not. Maybe these really were the first random people he turned his camera on after the mannequins, incredible though it seems, or maybe, given Heubler's admission ('I can say anything I want in these statements') he is just *saying* he did. In the end the decision is ours to believe. Or not.

Huebler's double assertion/negation of the system crops up again in a 1969 interview with Patricia Norvell. In it, Huebler first underscores the importance of the system to his work: 'I set up a system, and the system can catch a part of what is happening in the world – what's going on in the world – an appearance in the world, and suspend that appearance itself from being important. . . . The work is about the system.'[5] The system, in other words, 'suspends' or drains away entirely the conventional function of the photograph – its ability to capture 'appearance in the world'. As the interview continues, however, it becomes evident to Norvell that, in almost the same breath, Huebler will assert and negate the very system he has just been describing. Significantly, it is precisely the question of the interval period between photographs that prompts Norvell to question the status of Huebler's system:

> Douglas Huebler: Trying to show the system, or the idea, the things that you've set up as the structure within which you will work, is what the art's about.
>
> Patricia Norvell: But then you say it doesn't matter whether the pictures were taken every minute or every five days.
>
> Douglas Huebler: That's right.
>
> Patricia Norvell: So then you're destroying your system, or you're ignoring it?
>
> Douglas Huebler: Right, right, right. That's right because, as I said, these systems do not prove anything either. They're dumbbell systems . . . [6]

Publisher's Note:
Image not available
in the electronic edition

3 John Hilliard, *Camera Recording its Own Condition (7 Apertures, 10 Speeds, 2 Mirrors)*, 1971. Photographs on card on perspex, 2162 × 1832 mm. London: Tate Modern. Photo: © Tate, London 2009/Art Resource, New York.

If Huebler throws adherence to his own system into doubt, as he seems so intent to do, this undermining of his own ground rules is consistent with one side of what I've elsewhere argued to be to a more general strategy in Huebler's work of the 1970s.[7] For during this period, I've claimed, Huebler sets out to undermine two very different forms of photographic practice: on the one hand, the work of systems-based photographers such as Bernd and Hilla Becher, John Hilliard (plate 3), Mel Bochner, Edward Ruscha, or indeed Huebler's own early conceptual work of the late 1960s; and on the other a form of portraiture, often taken to expressive excess, in the mode of New York School photographers such as Diane Arbus, Richard Avedon, Bruce Davidson, and Lisette Model (plate 4). Significantly, from 1970 on, Huebler sets out to negate *both* these forms of photography in the very structure and subject of his work. Accordingly, he not only uses systems that more often than not do not work, introduce scepticism, or otherwise break down by design, but he also engages in a near-exclusive use of photographic portraiture. Indeed, the undoing of both systems-based photography and photographic portraiture through their own means is precisely what we see in *Variable Piece #105, London, 1972*.

Thus, according to the text of this work, the photographs are taken according to the constraints of a pre-established system: eighteen mannequins are

Publisher's Note:
Image not available
in the electronic edition

4 Lisette Model, *Woman with Veil, San Francisco*, 1949. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada (Gift of Dorothy Meigs Eidlitz, St Andrews, New Brunswick, 1968). Photo:© National Gallery of Canada. Used by permission of The Lisette Model Foundation, Inc. (1983).

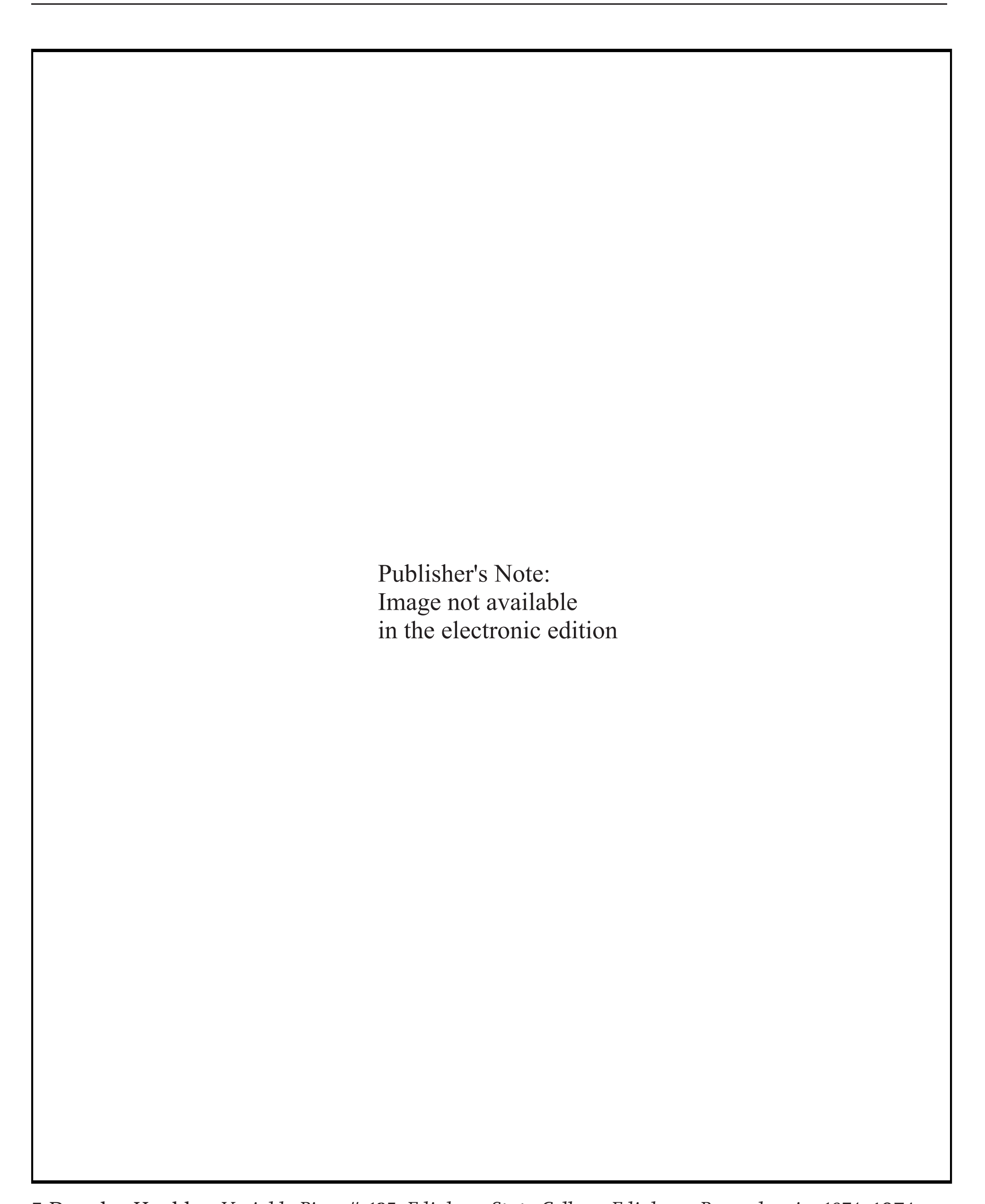
photographed at two minute intervals on Oxford Street in London. After each photograph is taken of a mannequin, another is then taken of the first person walking by of the same gender. Mannequins and people are then paired and, as seen in the final presentation, labelled from A to R. But in so clearly matching the appearance of person to mannequin – or, indeed, by presenting us with not one, but *two* sets of photographs marked 'D' – Huebler seems to suggest, if not actually flaunt, the contravening of his own rules, introducing a deal-breaking scepticism into the very system that he himself put in place. Far from laying to rest any doubts about his fidelity to the system, the appeal to patently bogus evidence in the form of the contact sheet only increases our distrust, as indeed I think it is intended to do.

So if Huebler pulls at the threads of systems-based photography in *Variable Piece # 105, London, 1972*, in what way do these photographs also unravel the expressivity of New York School photographic portraiture à la Arbus? The most obvious answer is that the system itself is designed precisely to frustrate the kind of authorial nuance one would expect in an Arbus or Davidson photograph. The sheer speed at which the work must be executed – the system requires that Huebler take thirty-six photographs in as many minutes – necessarily hinders the

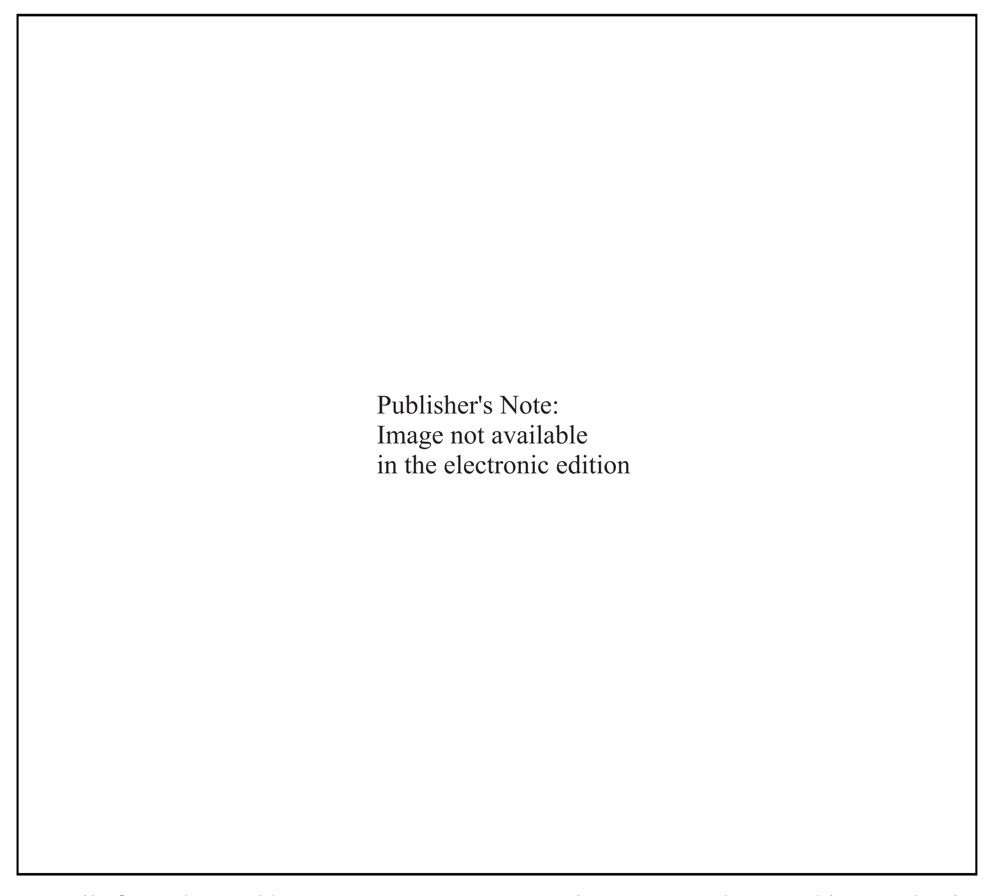
photographer's ability to introduce any aesthetic finesse into the final product. Likewise the decision to shoot these particular people is not based on how compelling or photogenic a face they might have – 'a face that can hold a wall', as Avedon put it[8] – but rather the pure arbitrariness of whoever walks by at that particular moment. Or so, at least, we are told. But if Huebler is indeed cheating – and to my eye he is at pains to show us that he is – then none of these constraints would apply. Huebler cannot, in other words, negate systems-based photography while at the same time appealing to it as a means to hollow out the aesthetic and expressive content of photographic portraiture.

In place of a system, then, I would argue that Huebler uses another strategy to flatten the subjective resonance of his faces. And this strategy is not only manifest in the breaking of rules that seems to me on open display in *Variable Piece # 105, London, 1972*, it is wholly dependent on it. For in his matching of mannequins, not with random passersby, but with actual look-alikes, one of the ways in which Huebler winks and nods to let us know that he is not being altogether true to his statement is the fact that look-alikes recur again and again as an explicit thematic concern of his work. We see this, for example, in *Variable Piece # 135, Edinboro State College, Edinboro, Pennsylvania, 1974* (plate 5), where Huebler awarded first, second, and third cash prizes to look-alike contestants who were judged to bear the greatest mutual resemblance. Again, each pairing appears slightly more absurd than the next, as we move across a range of similarities – from the not very, to the *almost* uncanny (I emphasize *almost*) – each mirroring the other in facial expression and/or, just to drive the point home, clothing. The double appears again – Huebler's own this time – in *Location Piece # 17, Turin, Italy, 1973* (plate 6). Accidentally taken by Huebler while in Turin, in this picture we see a grainy, photographic enlargement of a man who, according to Huebler's statement, bears 'a strong resemblance to the artist . . . at least more so than almost everyone else in the world'. If Huebler claims to have stumbled upon his long-lost double here, he finds an even more proximate doppelganger in *Variable Piece # 44, Global, 1971*, this time in the form of a past self (plate 7). In the final version of this work, forty-seven participants – Huebler included – provided two photographic images of their face, one taken in 1971, the other in 1981. Absences appear where individuals died or could not be contacted. For those with double portraits we see individuals doubled as simultaneously same *and* different, alike *and* unlike, cast in a relation of comparative difference.[9]

Knowing that Huebler was directly concerned with images of the double, it seems even more unlikely that the physical similarities between mannequins and people in *Variable Piece #105, London, 1972* are a fluke. But more than just giving the lie to Huebler's system, these particular doubles reflect Huebler's larger strategy to drain the photographic portrait of its expressive and subjective resonance. And they do so, significantly, in tandem with both the work's claim to coincidence (however dubious) – that this particular person just happened to walk by at this particular moment – and the use of mannequins. For even if one *were* to accept what the text tells us, rejecting my view that Huebler deliberately paired like with like, we would still have the effect of *almost* uncanny coincidence – though again I stress the almost. But if the claim to coincidence is too much to swallow, we are still left with doubles and mannequins.



5 Douglas Huebler, *Variable Piece # 135, Edinboro State College, Edinboro, Pennsylvania, 1974*, 1974. Photographic reproduction and text, dimensions variable. As printed in *Origin and Destination: Alighiero E Boetti, Douglas Huebler*, Brussels: Société des Exposition du Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, 1998. Photo: © 2009 Estate of Douglas Huebler/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.


Publisher's Note:
Image not available
in the electronic edition

6 Detail of Douglas Huebler, *Location Piece # 17, Turin, Italy, 1973*, 1973. Photographic reproduction and text, dimensions variable, 1973. As printed in *Douglas Huebler 'Variable', etc.*, Limoges: F.R.A.C. Limousin, 1993. Photo: © 2009 Estate of Douglas Huebler/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

So either way you cut it, what we end up with – astounding coincidences, doubles and mannequins – are the once privileged sites of surrealism's efforts to tap into 'the Marvellous'. Indeed, photographs of mannequins, almost de facto evoke (how can they not?) the precedent of surrealist photography (plate 8). That the surrealists were besotted with mannequins as 'a symbol apt at stirring human sensibility', as André Breton famously put it in the 1924 Surrealist Manifesto, is, of course, conventional knowledge by this point. Less well known is that, for Breton at least, the ability of mannequins or mannequin-like objects to stir this human sensibility is historically constituted. As Breton states: 'The Marvelous is not the same in every period of history: it partakes in some obscure way of a sort of general revelation only the fragments of which come down to us.'[10]

If Breton leaves this suggestion undeveloped – that the objects of the Marvellous are subject to the conditions of history – Fredric Jameson picks up the ball and runs with it. Thus, according to Jameson, a significant historical shift has occurred since the heyday of surrealism, such that the movement's once

venerated objects no longer carry, nor indeed to any real degree are they capable of carrying, the charge of uncanny *frisson*. But if the battery of the uncanny has gone flat, so to speak, it is not simply because these objects have degenerated into cliché (although presumably that doesn't help). Rather, Jameson argues that the surrealist delight in the face of these objects – a delight sparked as animate and inanimate co-mingle – is emblematic of, and indeed possible only in relation to, the broader conditions of mass production prior to World War Two. For at this particular moment in the twentieth century, in advance of full-blown monopoly capitalism, commodity objects continued to bear a trace, however repressed, of their human manufacturing. As Jameson puts it: 'what prepares these objects to receive the investment of psychic energy characteristic of their use by Surrealism is precisely the half-sketched, unaffected mark of human labor, of the human gesture, on them.'[11] Objects at this time thus appear to have been assembled by actual living workers, rather than machines. We see this – or more correctly, *sense* this – for instance, in the visible welds or the sundry screws and bolts of pre-war objects that have been inserted and tightened by human hands, in sharp contrast to the microelectronics and the plethora of brightly coloured, injection-moulded plastic gee-gaws that currently flood the aisles of our stores. Human sensibility returns as the repressed, haunting the forms of early and mid-twentieth-century commodity objects. Tom McDonough describes surrealism's interest in these ghost-like traces of human production within the industrial object in this way:

Publisher's Note:
Image not available
in the electronic edition

7 Douglas Huebler, *Variable Piece # 44, Global, 1971*, 1971. Photographs and printed text on board, 457 × 613 mm. London: Tate Modern. As printed in *Douglas Huebler 'Variable', etc.*, Limoges: F.R.A.C. Limousin, 1993. Photo: © 2009 Estate of Douglas Huebler/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Publisher's Note:
Image not available
in the electronic edition

8 Raoul Ubac, *Dalí's Rainy Taxi*, 1938, detail of Salvador Dalí, *Rainy Taxi*, from the International Surrealist Exhibition, Galerie de Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1938. Gelatin silver print. Photo: © 2009 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

> The critical force of the spectral was linked ultimately to the project of rational enlightenment. The world of commodities might present itself as a phantasmagoria, alternately terrifying and seductive, but the mechanisms of such false appearance and illusion could be revealed for what they were; what Marx called the 'religion of the everyday' could be shown to be the product of mere human labor and the social relations between producers. Even the Surrealist interest in the uncanny was less a means of reenchanting the world than of figuring the alienated labor that lay behind the false appearance of the commodity.[12]

The same traces of a repressed human sensibility are also found in the distribution of these objects, which during the surrealist era depended largely on small shopkeepers who distributed goods produced by equally small workshops to an established and known clientele. Face-to-face interactions, as T. J. Clark describes them, continued to serve the entwined social and business interests of Parisian *quartier* life; long after the city's initial wave of modernization, such that 'business and sociability were bound together'.[13]

Along the same lines, it is significant that the *marché aux puce*, with all its complex back-and-forth negotiations of price, was the privileged site of discovery for the surrealists. It is this spectral presence – this stirring of human sensibility in the otherwise lifeless industrial object – that is brought to the fore with surrealism's fascination with mannequins, waxworks, automatons, and the like. 'The mannequin', Jameson writes, thus serves as a: 'veritable emblem of the sensibility of a whole age, [the] supreme token of the surrealist transformation of life – in which the human body itself comes before us as a product, where the nagging awareness of another presence . . . the terror of the blue gaze that meets us from the doll's eyes . . . figure emblematically the central discovery of Surrealism of the properties of the objects that surround it.'[14]

Along similar lines, Hal Foster argues that surrealism's interest in outmoded objects and sites of commodity exchange – he takes Breton's *trouvaille* (lucky find) of a spoon with a boot carved into its handle as the former, and where he found it, the flea market, as the latter – are part and parcel of the historical nature of the uncanny. As Foster writes:

> The spoon is thus an instance of the first order of the surrealist outmoded: a token of a precapitalist relation that commodity exchange has displaced or submerged. Here its recovery might spark a brief illumination of a past productive mode, social formation, and structure of feeling – an uncanny repressed moment of direct manufacture, simple barter, and personal use.[15]

To the still perceptible trace of the commodity's human origins and distribution during the pre-war period, Jameson contrasts the flat, hollow, lifeless objects of pop – Warhol's soup cans, for instance, or Wesselmann's still lives. But a much better comparison, I think, is the more direct example of Huebler's *Variable Piece # 105, London, 1972*. For in the utterly matter-of-fact faces of Huebler's mannequins and look-alikes, one would be hard pressed to find even the faintest flutter of Breton's Marvellous.

So what does all of this have to do with what Benjamin Buchloh has described as 'the spectacular and grotesque distortions of subjectivity in the New York school [of photographic portraiture]', which, you will recall, I am claiming to be the target of Huebler's turn to photographic portraiture in the 1970s? Before I get to Arbus and her contemporaries, however, I want to look first at another, non-Marxist and much more melancholic argument that our contemporary world of images has become flat and lifeless, this time in direct relation to photography. This occurs in the concluding pages of Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*. Towards the very end of the book, he makes a veiled but unmistakable reference to E. T. A. Hoffmann's famous story 'The Sand-Man'. Barthes has been trying to describe the 'madness' and 'hallucinatory' effect of photography, when suddenly we find this:

> The same evening of a day I had again been looking at photographs of my mother, I went to see Fellini's *Casanova* with some friends; I was sad, the film exasperated me; but when Casanova began dancing with the young automaton, my eyes were touched with a kind of acute and delicious pain, as if I were suddenly experiencing the effects of a strange drug; each detail, which I was seeing so exactly, savoring, so to speak, every last part of it . . . . At which moment I could not help but thinking of Photography. . . . Was I not, in fact, in love with the Fellini's automaton? Is one not in love with certain photographs?[16]

The reference is clear: for not only does the protagonist of Hoffman's story – the young Nathaniel – also, like Barthes, fall in love with an automaton, he succumbs in turn to hallucinations and madness – the very attributes that Barthes sees as at the heart of his love of photography.

Barthes' allusion to the 'Sand-Man' is, of course, a reference within a reference; it is not Hoffmann's story per se that interests Barthes, but Freud's famous reading of it in an essay, 'The Uncanny'. More than any other text, it was this essay that brought automatons, waxworks, mannequins, and identical twins to theoretical life. But as with automatons, Barthes claims, so too with photographs – or at least the photographs that he loves, the photographs that touch and wound him. And in this claim for photography's uncanniness, Barthes is by no means alone. Indeed, if the uncanny, as a theoretical concept, has become more than a little tired of late – one can barely speak the term these days without the blush of academic embarrassment – a significant amount of photographic criticism has seemed immune from this fatigue. Thus, for many writers on photography, the medium is haunted by an inherent uncanniness. 'There is something uncanny in every photograph',[17] Eduardo Cadava and Paola Cortés-Rocca state unequivocally, while for Carol Armstrong, 'the disquiet resident in photography, is nothing else but the photographic uncanny, buried in the homely, everyday, banal details of every-photograph.'[18] Or again, as George Baker puts it, there exists a 'primary uncanniness that belongs to the photographic as such'.[19]

Alas, Barthes argues mournfully, the photographic uncanny that he associates with the dancing automaton is definitively not present 'as such' nor 'in every photograph'. Quite the contrary, in fact, for it is precisely this madness that is all but lost to us. 'Society', Barthes writes in the concluding section of his book (and by this it is clear he means contemporary society), 'is concerned to tame the photograph, to temper the madness which keeps threatening to explode in the face of whoever looks at it.' As Barthes states, the photograph is tamed when it becomes generalized and banal (these are his terms). This, he claims, is the 'great mutation' – a mutation, or what he also calls a reversal, such that we no longer see our desires projected onto the photograph, but the opposite: our desire now originates with the images. As Barthes puts it:

> What characterizes the so-called advanced societies is that they today consume images and no longer, like those of the past, beliefs; they are therefore . . . more 'false' (less authentic) . . . as if the universal image were producing a world without difference, from which can rise, here and there, only the cries of anachronisms, marginalisms, and individualisms: let us abolish the images, let us save desire (desire without mediation).

So writes Barthes on the concluding page of *Camera Lucida*, with a Debordian tinge of despair at the colonization of our desires by the image.

If Barthes strikes a more melancholic, despairing note than Jameson's Marxism would allow, lamenting that the once-hallucinatory power of photographs has become generalized and banal (and like Jameson, it is hard not to suspect he also has Warhol in the back of his mind here), both critics nonetheless come to the same conclusion. Thus even though Jameson doesn't address the subject of photography directly, it is clear that he, like Barthes, would

Publisher's Note:
Image not available
in the electronic edition

9 Douglas Huebler, *Variable Piece # 506, Tower of London Series, London, 1975*, 1975. Photographic reproduction and printed text, dimensions variable. As printed in *Douglas Huebler 'Variable', etc.*, Limoges: F.R.A.C. Limousin, 1993. Photo: © 2009 Estate of Douglas Huebler/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

no more attribute an innate uncanniness to the medium, outside the conditions of history, than he would to mannequins. And with this Huebler is in total agreement. For the claim to photography's constitutive uncanniness is exactly what Huebler's photographic portraits render null. And what is more, they do so precisely in the context of a prominent assertion of photography's uncanniness, not by critics so much as by photographers. Huebler's mannequins should therefore be seen in stark opposition to Arbus's, Model's, or Helen Levitt's coupling of persons with mannequins, or Arbus's photographs of waxworks, that favoured image of the 'marvellous', and, of course, her doubles. Confronted with a widespread draining away of photographic affect, Arbus appears to respond by ratcheting up the subjective intensity of her photographs through an appeal to these slightly tired sites of the Marvellous. And it is precisely this intensity that we see Huebler, not just tamping back down, but hallowing out altogether. Carol Armstrong claims that Arbus's image of identical twins 'surely signifies ''Diane Arbus'' as much as anything else', and who could claim otherwise?[20] Certainly not Huebler, I think, who presents us with his twins as a kind of riposte.

I exit here not with uncanny doubling, or the manifest lack thereof, but with another (un)uncanny image: the image of a ghost as it appears in Huebler's *Variable Piece # 506*, *Tower of London Series, London, 1975* (plate 9). 'Many people experience the feeling [of the uncanny] in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts.'[21] If there is a grain of truth in this statement of Freud's, one would be hard pressed

to find even the faintest trace of it in *Variable Piece # 506*, *Tower of London Series, London, 1975*.[22] In this work, Huebler presents us with various close-range photographs of the walls of the Tower of London. From these he in turn made a series of enlargements that, as he writes in his statement, 'reveal forms indicating the eternal presence of the essence of some of the individuals once held prisoner in that place'. In the photographic details of the wall, Huebler looks for – and finds – a variety of malformed shapes that can be seen, with a generous eye, to resemble human faces. These faces he then couples with portraits of historical 'Famous Tower Figures'. As much as Arbus's twins have come to signify 'Diane Arbus', the faces of these ghosts, for me, have come to signify 'Douglas Huebler' – or at least that side of his practice that engages with the status of photographic portraiture. For in these empty faces, we catch a glimpse, not of a ghost, but of the empty remains of the once spectral presence of photography.

Notes

Particular thanks to Diarmuid Costello, Margaret Iversen, and Jennie King for all of their help and feedback. Grateful acknowledgement also to Darcy Huebler for all of her help and permission for the use of images.

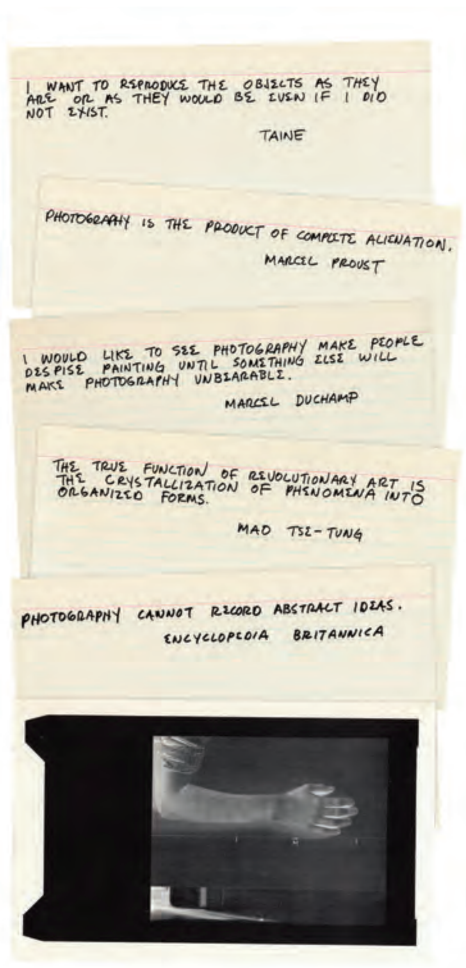
1 Douglas Huebler, 'Douglas Huebler', in Peggy Gale, ed., *Artists Talk: 1969–1977*, Halifax, 2004, 227.
2 Sol LeWitt, 'Paragraphs on conceptual art', *Artforum*, 10, June 1967, 79; reprinted in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Cambridge, MA, 2000, 12.
3 Douglas Huebler, in Arthur R. Rose [pseudo.], 'Four interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, Weiner', *Arts Magazine*, 4, February, 1969; Reprinted in Gregory Battcock, ed., *Idea Art: A Critical Anthology*, New York, 1973, 144.
4 Huebler, *Artists Talk*, 224.
5 Douglas Huebler, Interview with Patricia Norvell, 25 July 1969, in Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell, eds. *Recording Conceptual Art*, Berkeley, CA, 2001, 147.
6 Huebler, Interview with Patricia Norvell, 148.
7 See my, 'Game face: Douglas Huebler and the voiding of photographic portraiture', *Art Journal*, 4, Winter 2007, 52–69.
8 Laura Wilson, *Avedon at Work in the American West*, Austin, TX, 2003 102; quoted in Julian Stallabrass, 'What's in a face? Blankness and significance in contemporary art photography', *October*, 122, 2007, 78–9.
9 Again note how Huebler appears to violate his own rules, using photographs that seem fairly obviously to have a more than ten-year age difference. The early photo is also used in *Variable Piece # 17*, a work from 1973, which calls into question whether or not it was taken in 1971 as claimed.
10 André Breton, 'Manifesto of surrealism' (1924), *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, Anne Arbor, MI, 1969, 16.
11 Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, Princeton, NJ, 1971, 104.
12 Tom McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of My Century: Reinventing the Language of Contestation in Postwar France, 1945–1968*, Cambridge, MA, 2007, 184–5.
13 T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, Princeton, NJ, 1984, 52.
14 Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 104–5.
15 Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, Cambridge, MA, 1993, 161.
16 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, New York, 1981, 115–16.
17 Eduardo Cadava and Paola Cortés-Rocca, 'Notes on love and photography', *October*, 116, Spring 2006, 16.
18 Carol Armstrong, 'From Clementina to Käsebier: the photographic attainment of the ''Lady Amateur''', *October*, 91, Winter 2000, 106.
19 George Baker, 'Photography between narrativity and stasis: August Sander, degeneration, and the decay of the portrait', *October*, 76, Spring 1996, 101.

20 Carol Armstrong, 'Biology, destiny, photography: difference according to Diane Arbus', *October*, 66, Fall 1993, 37.

21 Sigmund Freud, 'The uncanny', from *The Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 14: Art and Literature*, trans. James Strachey, London, 1985, 364.

22 Tom McDonough makes a similar claim for Pierre Huyghe's and Philipe Parreno's *No Ghost Just a Shell* to the one I am making for Huebler's work. As McDonough argues, Huyghe and Parreno signal 'the demise of one of the great figures of modern oppositional culture – the obsession with specters and the phantasmogoric, the untimely and the unhomely, activated by the Surrealists some eighty years ago as the return of what bourgeois society resolutely had repressed. It is the uncanny itself whose critical force seems to have become exhausted.' McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of My Century*, 181.





1 Mel Bochner, *Misunderstandings (A Theory of Photography)*, 1967–70. Photo offset on ten note-cards, manila envelope, 5 × 8 inches each. Photo: © Mel Bochner.

 ISBN: 978-1-444-33360-2

6

PRODUCTIVE MISUNDERSTANDINGS: INTERPRETING MEL BOCHNER'S THEORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

LUKE SKREBOWSKI

Mel Bochner is conventionally considered a conceptual artist. Bochner, however, objects to the label and, having started his career as a painter, is now painting again.[1] In fact he has been painting since 1973, in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of first generation conceptual art. Why are conceptual artists painting again? 'Because they think it's a good idea.' Or so runs the provocative thesis of a recent series of talks addressing the conditions of contemporary practice organized by the critic Jan Verwoert.[2] Is it a good idea? This question demands to be approached historically and theoretically as well as empirically: that conceptual artists are painting again does not prove it is a good idea. Nevertheless, the empirical observation is certainly enough to prompt a fresh consideration. Bochner's return to painting in 1973, and the reasons he has advanced in support of it, forms an essential point of reference. Counter-intuitively perhaps, Bochner's return to painting can best be understood with reference to his short-lived and still little discussed photographic practice.[3] In view of this, in what follows I will frame Bochner's photography through a critical reading of *Misunderstandings (A Theory of Photography)* (1967–70). By reconstructing and interpreting its claims, I will also show that *Misunderstandings* can be made productive within a closely related context, the ongoing assessment of the critical and historical significance of photoconceptualism. Conceptual art, despite its highly contested critical legacy, is widely held to constitute an enduring negation of the importance of 'medium' as a legitimate guarantor of an object's status as art. Conceptual artists' use of photography (as a 'non-art' form) has been understood as one of the main means by which this negation was pursued.[4]

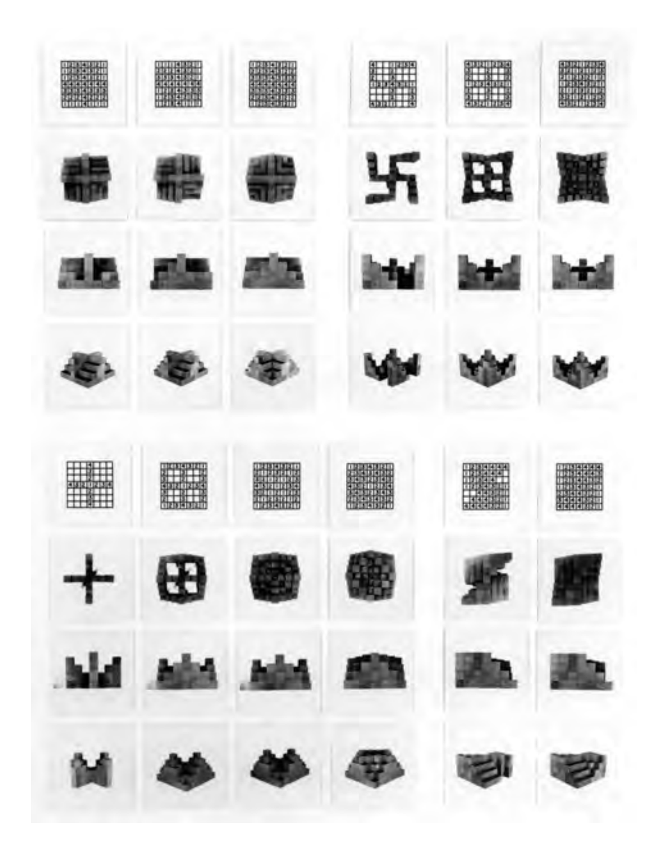
Surprisingly, Verwoert sets up the problem of 'conceptual painting' as a question of 'what medium-specific practices like painting or sculpture can do today' even while he acknowledges that, taking into account the development of art after conceptual art, such practices have 'no preset justification'.[5] Given that Verwoert is concerned specifically with 'conceptual artists' who are 'painting again', it would seem more coherent to elaborate the problematic without reference to medium-specificity. Such an apparent contradiction must be understood against the backdrop of the constitution of photography as a new artistic medium in the wake of the collapse of photoconceptualism. Considered illegitimate as art in the early

1960s, by the mid-1990s photography had arguably taken the place of painting as the dominant 'medium' of mainstream contemporary art. After (photo)-conceptualism, photography was turned into 'Art, with a big A', as Jeff Wall has described it: 'Photoconceptualism led the way toward the complete acceptance of photography as art – autonomous, bourgeois, collectible art – by virtue of insisting that this medium might be privileged to be the negation of that whole idea.'[6] For Wall, whose claims have been highly influential, conceptual art attempted a negation of medium-specific, or 'canonical' art by photographic means ('photoconceptualism') but failed, with the result that photography was assimilated into canonical art as a legitimate artistic medium. In this context, one way that painting might be a 'good idea' again would be as a negation of the photograph-as-medium (as art). A critical question, after conceptual art (and specifically after photoconceptualism), is whether painting, as 'conceptual painting', can make this challenge. This is a problem that Bochner's painting has long recognized. His work thus anticipates contemporary debates and holds out consequences for the theorization of photography in, and as, conceptual art that are still under-acknowledged.

FROM PRACTICE TO THEORY

In 1966 Mel Bochner had no expertise with a camera.[7] He chanced upon photography as a means to show his process-based sculpture in a gallery context without producing an undesired 'objecthood'. Here Bochner, along with Bruce Nauman, Robert Smithson and others formed part of an emerging 'post-minimalist' response to the perceived contradiction between minimalism's emphasis on contextual concerns and the residual monumentality of much minimalist work, up to, and arguably including, Robert Morris's 'anti-form' pieces. The images in Bochner's first photographic work, *36 Photos and 12 Diagrams* (1966) (plate 2) were taken by Gretchen Lambert, a professional photographer who had made her reputation in the New York art world shooting minimalist works for publication. Yet, as early as 1967, Bochner realized that his own artistic practice had come to focus on the photographs themselves, that his work had 'become about photography without [my] wanting it to'.[8] Seeking to ground his photographic work theoretically, Bochner determined to 'look into the history of the medium and find out what's been written about it, what the issues are'.[9]

The photographic literature of the mid-1960s proved of little use to the young artist: 'what I found was really pretty dumb – it had no value in any theoretical terms. And the more I read, the more I began to see it all as a colossal misunderstanding.'[10] Bochner, nevertheless, resolved to make something of such unpromising material. He attempted to use it as a foil for his practice: 'so I started compiling a set of misunderstandings. After a while I had quite a large number of these quotations which I wanted to publish.'[11] This motley assortment of quotations was assembled under the provisional title of *Dead Ends and Vicious Circles* (1967), and pitched to *Artforum* as a magazine feature.[12] Philip Leider, the editor, knocked it back testily asserting that 'we're not a goddamn photography magazine, this is an art magazine, don't give me anything on photography, we don't do photography!'[13] Leider's vituperative comments indicate how marginal photography's status was for the art establishment of the time. A second pitch,

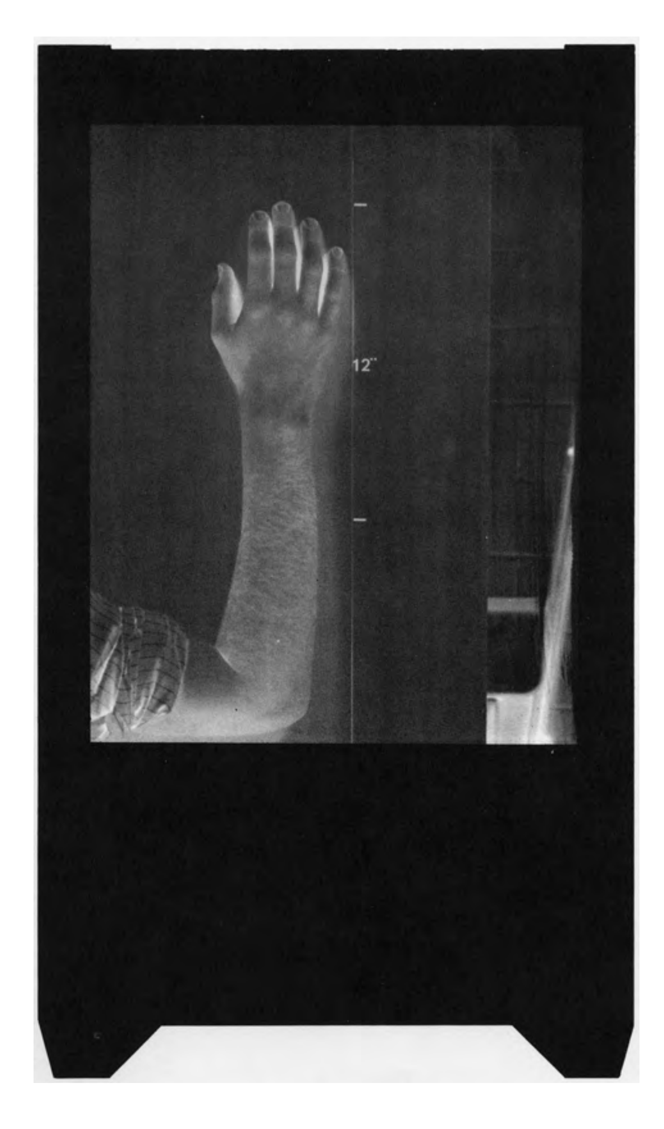


2 Mel Bochner, *36 Photos and 12 Diagrams*, 1966. Thirty-six gelatin silver prints and twelve pen and ink drawings, 8 × 8 inches each, 73 × 55 inches overall. Munich: Stadtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus. Photo: © Mel Bochner.

this time to *Art in America*, was also rejected on similar grounds. As Bochner explains in retrospect, 'in 1967 there was no place for photography in a contemporary art gallery. It was almost impossible to get an art dealer to look at, let alone exhibit, anything photographic.'[14] This was because 'photography was seen as the enemy of all the values of late modernism . . . and as things turned out it was.'[15] At this stage though, Bochner was disheartened by such rejections and shelved his initial version of the project.

In 1970, however, the gallery owner Marian Goodman gave Bochner a fresh opportunity to realize the work. She determined to issue a boxed set of artists' photographs and Bochner was invited to contribute to the edition, along with Robert Smithson, Dan Graham, Ed Ruscha, and Sol LeWitt, amongst others. He delivered a new version of *Dead Ends and Vicious Circles* for Goodman, and re-titled it *Misunderstandings (A Theory of Photography)* (1967–70). By giving the work a new title in this way Bochner assimilated it to his burgeoning *Theory* series, which also included *The Theory of Painting* (1969), *Ten Aspects of the Theory of Measurement* (1969), *The Theory of Boundaries* (1969–70) and, subsequently, *A Theory of Sculpture [Incomplete]* (1971–72).[16]

Misunderstandings comprised ten photo-offset prints on index cards, all enclosed in a manila envelope (see plate 1). Nine of the ten cards featured handwritten versions of some of the quotations about photography Bochner had already assembled, to his own dissatisfaction, from notable figures in the arts, politics, philosophy and the sciences. The remaining card featured an image, a



3 Mel Bochner, *Actual Size (Hand)*, 1970. Photo offset on notecard [detail of *Misunderstandings (A Theory of Photography)*], 5 × 8 inches. Photo: © Mel Bochner.

'negative' of Bochner's own hand and forearm, laid alongside a 12″ marker (plate 3). Bochner had already used the image on this card along with the quotations on two of the others in, or as, other works.[17] As such, even though Bochner denies that there is any hierarchy amongst the quotations, these three cards seem to encourage more interpretative effort than the others.[18]

Teasingly, Bochner has asserted that his 'selection of quotations . . . might (or might not) suggest the impossibility of a "theory" of photography.'[19] The three cards suggest a response to this provocation. In fact by isolating just these three cards Bochner's wilfully perplexing 'theory,' or perhaps better anti-theory, of photography can be interpreted. In so doing, the significance of Bochner's relatively brief, but highly intense, period of photographic experiment from 1966 to 1970, of which *Misunderstandings* was the summation, can be drawn out. Even before issuing *Misunderstandings* as a multiple, Bochner had given up the photographic component of his practice and he has not resumed it since.

DESPISING PAINTING

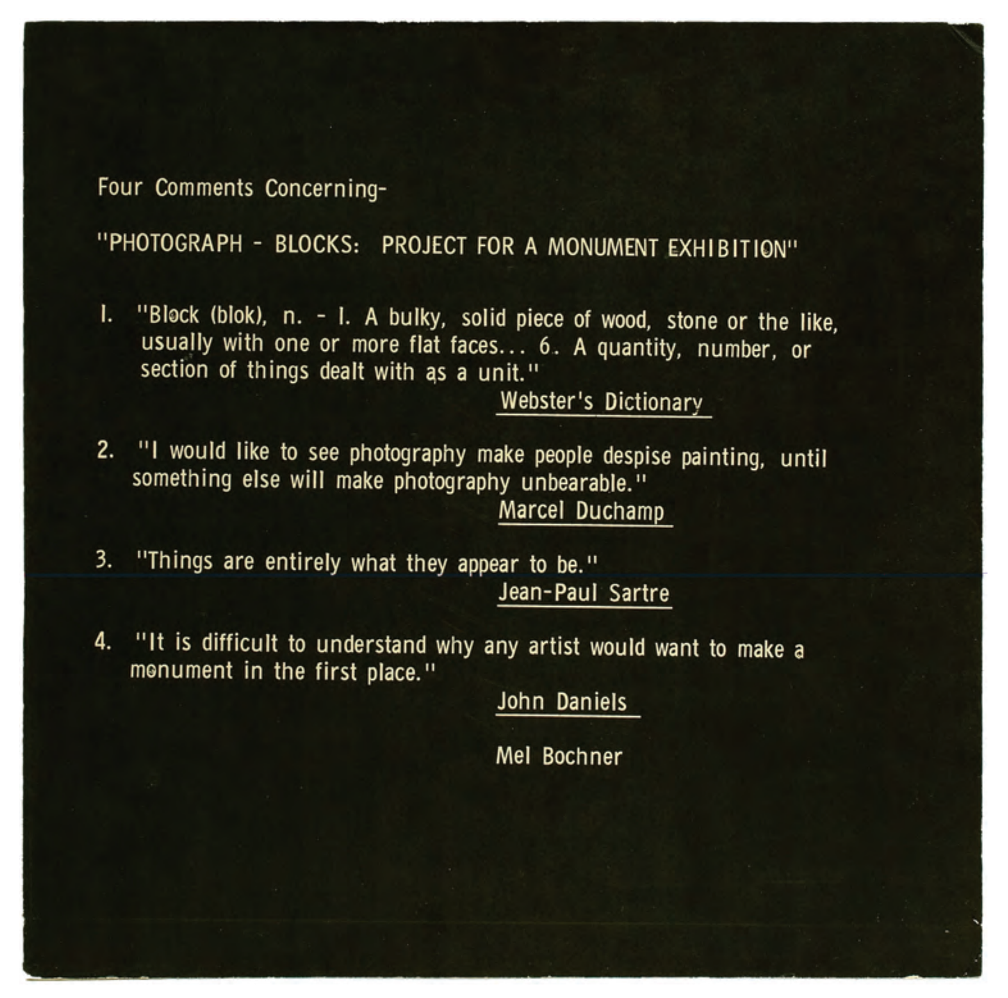
The first of the three cards to be considered here features a quotation from Marcel Duchamp: 'I would like to see photography make people despise painting until something else will make photography unbearable.' *Misunderstandings* is a deliberately opaque work. Bochner has stated not only that he considered the quotations he included within it to be 'dumb', but also that he faked three of them, mischievously undermining their theoretical utility still further. To this day Bochner refuses to specify which of the quotations are false.[20] Yet this Duchamp quotation, though abridged, is genuine. It comes from a letter, now well known, that Duchamp wrote to Alfred Stieglitz in 1922, responding unfavourably to the American's project to have photography recognized as a fine art.[21] Duchamp's statement is clearly modelled on the nineteenth-century commonplace that photography would 'take the place of painting', so hackneyed as to have merited reference in Flaubert's *Dictionary of Received Ideas* (posthumously published in 1911). In this sense, then, it could be considered a misunderstanding; photography had not taken the place of painting, even by the late 1960s. Yet Bochner had used this same Duchamp quotation before, including it as one of his *Four Comments Concerning: Photograph Blocks* (1967) (plate 4). For Bochner then, there was something more to the remark. In fact, Duchamp reformulates a commonplace misunderstanding, that one representational art would simply replace another, turning it into a pithy objection to the representational-as-art.

Duchamp's readymades had, of course, already actualized his own anti-representational and anti-retinal rhetoric. However, the readymade ultimately failed to negate the 'depictive' arts.[22] As Wall has observed of Duchamp's readymade: 'something significant has happened, but the anticipated transformation does not materialise, or it materialises incompletely, in a truncated form.'[23] Wall goes on to clarify this claim:

> Since a depiction cannot be selected as a readymade, depiction is therefore not included in Duchamp's negation. This is not to say that the depictive arts are not affected by the subversion carried out in the form of the readymade; far from it. But any effect such a subversion will have on them is exerted in terms of their exemption from the claims it makes about art, not their inclusion.[24]

Conceptual art aimed to succeed where Duchamp had not, by rendering a work's status as a painting decisively insufficient to qualify it for status as art. The use of photography in, or as, conceptual art was one way in which this was pursued.[25] Bochner took up photography at a time when painting was still entrenched as a medium, when photography was still not considered admissible as art. In this sense then, Bochner and other photoconceptualists enacted Duchamp's first negation, that of painting by photography, for the first time.

But what about the second negation, the negation of photography by 'something else'? Paradoxically, the most prominent outcome of conceptual art's progressive use of photography has been regressive (at least according to the terms established by conceptual art). Photography after conceptual art, developing a restricted reading of conceptual art's 'failure', has legitimated itself as a new and autonomous artistic medium, a way to continue the Western tradition of 'depictive' art. It is Wall's tableaux, and his own sophisticated theoretical work in


Four Comments Concerning-

"PHOTOGRAPH - BLOCKS: PROJECT FOR A MONUMENT EXHIBITION"

1. "Block (blok), n. - 1. A bulky, solid piece of wood, stone or the like, usually with one or more flat faces... 6. A quantity, number, or section of things dealt with as a unit."
Webster's Dictionary

2. "I would like to see photography make people despise painting, until something else will make photography unbearable."
Marcel Duchamp

3. "Things are entirely what they appear to be."
Jean-Paul Sartre

4. "It is difficult to understand why any artist would want to make a monument in the first place."
John Daniels

Mel Bochner

4 Mel Bochner, *Four Comments Concerning: Photograph Blocks*, 1967. Photocopy mounted on board, 12 × 12 inches. Photo: © Mel Bochner.

support of them, that have been historically constitutive and the model for a legion of less sophisticated imitators.

Yet Wall acknowledges that his widely influential critical history of 'Photography in or as conceptual art' examines only 'aspects' of the history; actively pursuing 'only two' of the 'several important directions' that photoconceptualism took.[26] Nevertheless, much of the detailed historical and critical work exploring the other important directions that Wall omits remains to be done.[27] The result is that Wall's strong but limited analysis of directions within photoconceptualism has become generalized as the history of photoconceptualism proper. Wall's claims about photography's role in the 'failure' of photoconceptualism and the installation of photography as a canonical 'depictive' art form, the legitimate inheritor of the Western picture, have largely been accepted.[28]

By recovering Bochner's strain of photoconceptualism, however, the scope of the category is enlarged. Another 'aspect' is added to the story. For if one might wish to distinguish a contemporary 'post-conceptual photography' from 'photo-

graphy after conceptual art' (on the grounds that the first formulation suggests a practice which holds within itself the lessons learnt by having worked through the challenges posed to visual representation by conceptual art, whereas the second suggests only a practice which comes after conceptual art chronologically, one that may well be hostile towards its achievements), then it is nonetheless clear that a comprehensive account of photoconceptualism is needed if 'post-conceptual photography' is to constitute a fully elaborated critical category and not just a weak and historically under-specified one. Beyond the interests of historical accuracy, there are real stakes at issue in putting pressure on Wall's genealogy of photoconceptualism via a recovery of Bochner's photographic work (work that does not feature in Wall's account). Wall's position is becoming increasingly reactionary, turning back from the gains that progressive practice made in the 1960s (including that of his own earlier work): 'medium has been made problematic, but only outside the canonical forms. The canonical forms simply do not have a way to escape medium, or a need to do so.'[29] A consequence of the status accorded Wall's genealogy of photoconceptualism (and his own work as the culmination of the 'directions' he analyses) has been the global proliferation of banal photographic tableaux staking a claim to the name of advanced art. In the contemporary artworld photography is becoming 'unbearable' all of its own accord. There is of course a long history of attempts to have photography recognized as an art medium, from early efforts by Stieglitz and the pictorialists, through John Szarkowski's at MoMA in the late 1960s and early 1970s, to Wall's own. Yet it is only relatively recently that photography has obtained widespread acceptance as such (with prices to match), and Wall's particular 'artification' of photography has played a decisive role.[30] Consequently the grounds of any contemporary negation of photography, any attempt to fulfil Duchamp's hopes, will be obliged to proceed via a critique of Wall's position and will need to provide an alternative to his historical and theoretical account of photography's development as art.

THREATENING THE ART IN PHOTOGRAPHY

The second card for consideration bears a quotation attributed to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* which may or may not be genuine: 'Photography Cannot Record Abstract Ideas'.[31] Whether it is genuine or not, the year before its inclusion in *Misunderstandings* Bochner had also issued the quotation as an individual work, *Photography Cannot Record Abstract Ideas* (1969) (plate 5). Both works belie the quotation's claim. Here is a photographic record of an abstract idea, viz. of that which photography purportedly cannot record. Though initially presenting itself as little more than a flip repudiation of the quality of knowledge sold door-to-door, the piece repays further attention. It provokes reconsideration of one of the most tenacious claims about photography, one that Wall makes central to his claims about photography-as-medium (as art), namely that a photograph, *qua* photograph, is 'depictive':

> Photography cannot find alternatives to depiction, as could the other fine arts. It is in the physical nature of the medium to depict things. In order to participate in the kind of reflexivity made mandatory for modernist art, photography can put into play only its own necessary condition of being a depiction-which-constitutes-an-object.[32]



5 Mel Bochner, *Photography Cannot Record Abstract Ideas*, 1969. Silver dye bleach print, 16 × 20 inches. Photo: © Mel Bochner.

This is of course a transposition of Greenberg's familiar claims about medium-specificity, but it repays being explicitly contrasted with them:

> The unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thus would each art be rendered 'pure', and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence.[33]

Greenberg's own position on photography's claim to art status sits uneasily with Wall's transposition. Greenberg's arguments about painting were not the same as those he applied to photography. For Greenberg photography was a mixed mode: 'the art in photography is literary art before it is anything else: its triumphs and monuments are historical, anecdotal, reportorial, observational before they are properly pictorial.'[34] Greenberg also asserted that 'I myself happen to find, on the basis of experience and nothing else, that photography can be a high art.'[35] Greenberg thus relies on his view that photography can occasion aesthetic experience, rather than on its medium-specific characteristics, as the guarantor of its art status. Although he acknowledges photography as art, he does not do so on the basis of its self-reflexivity as a medium. In other words, for Greenberg, photography is not a medium in the strong sense.

It is important to put pressure on Wall's account because it implies that the 'internal aestheticization' that afflicted many, but not all, photoconceptualist practices should be considered the historical fate of photoconceptualism as a whole.[36] John Roberts notes a historical alternative to the 'incipient pictorialism' within photoconceptualism in John Hilliard's and Roger Cutworth's emphasis on the constructed nature of photographic truth-telling: 'the work from this period (1970–73) is perhaps the only photo-based conceptual art which is actually discursively engaged with the mechanics and chemistry of the photographic document.'[37] The point is apposite but misses Bochner's earlier contribution to precisely this type of photoconceptualism.[38]

In the most substantive critical account of Bochner's photography published so far, Scott Rothkopf has persuasively argued that it was Bochner's failure to achieve sufficiently 'literal' photos of his early process-based sculpture that caused him to begin to interrogate photography as an illusionistic medium.[39] Subtle quirks of the photographic apparatus such as lens-barrel perspectival distortions and insufficient fill-in flash coverage frustrated Bochner's original desire for 'objectivity'.[40] Realizing that even his professionally commissioned photographs never achieved this, Bochner instead began to present failures of depiction. After his abortive attempts to capture his block constructions in perfect planar perspective, Bochner made a new series of works collapsing perspectival conventions in on themselves, for example, *Perspective Insert (Collapsed Centre)* (1967) (plate 6). He started to pull photography apart as a 'depictive' medium and began working over its purported ontological ground. In so doing, Bochner went beyond most conceptual artists' vernacular use of photography as a direct recording of objects in the 'real' world.[41] In so doing, Bochner challenged photography's status as a medium whose specificity could be secured as 'depictive' long before Wall argued for instituting photography as an art medium on precisely these grounds. Bochner thereby furnishes an objection to Wall's totalizing claims that 'photoconceptualism was . . . the last moment in the prehistory of photography as art.'[42]

It might be objected that *Photography Cannot Record Abstract Ideas* (1969) is still 'depictive' because, although it records an abstract idea photographically, it also remains a depiction of a note card. It was in the projects that Bochner conducted under the aegis of Robert Rauschenberg and Billy Klüwer's Experiments in Art and Technology (EAT) programme that the artist was really able to get to grips with photography as a 'depictive' apparatus. Here he came as close as the technology of the time would allow to realizing a truly abstract photograph. For his first EAT-funded venture, the *Transparent and Opaque* (1968) series (plate 7), Bochner commissioned a baffled professional product photographer to shoot squirls of toothpaste and streaks of Vaseline bearing an unmistakeable, and parodic, relation to the 'allover' composition of abstract expressionism. As Bochner has explained, 'I had in the back of my mind the whole question of painting: paint, image, representation, abstraction, composition. But doing it through photography was a way of demythologising them, of subverting the romanticism of painting.'[43] *Transparent and Opaque* can also be understood as an important step in subverting the incipient romanticism of photography. Yet it was not until a later EAT-sponsored project that Bochner's intent became unequivocal. In 1968 he undertook an artist's residency at the Singer Corporation, then heavily involved in developing telecommunications technology. The first pages of his unpublished *The Singer Notes* (plate 8) demonstrate

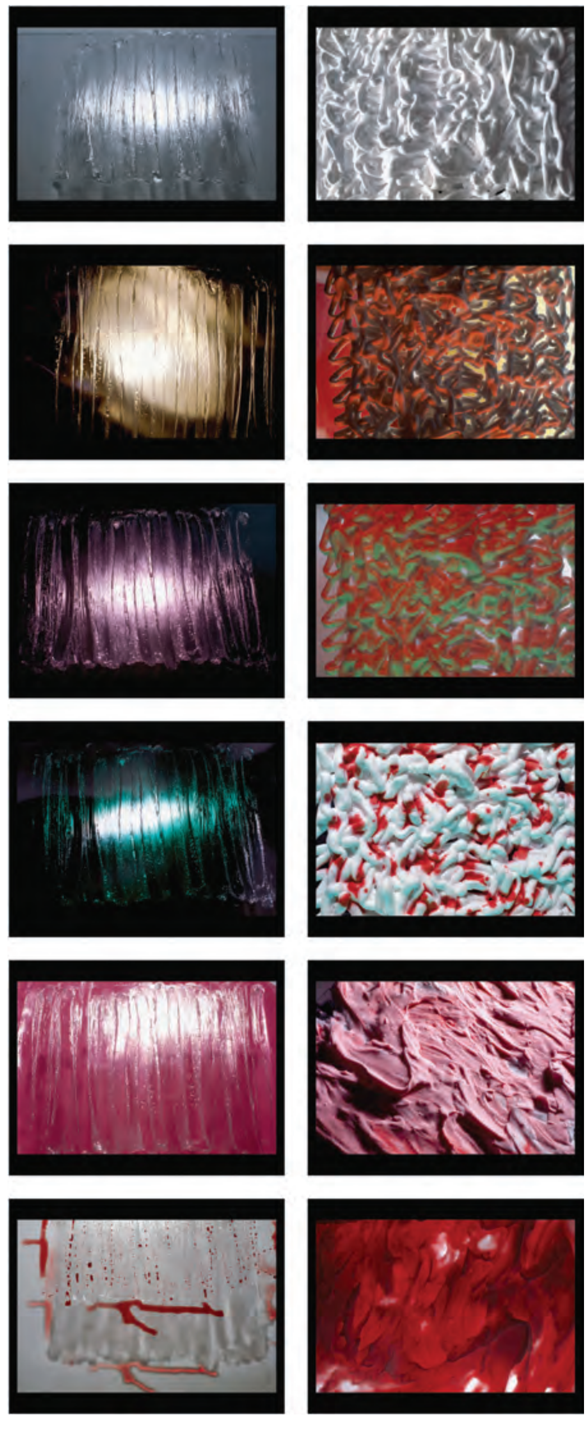


6 Mel Bochner, *Perspective Insert (Collapsed Centre)*, 1967. Gelatin silver print mounted on masonite, 48 × 48.5 inches. Photo: © Mel Bochner.

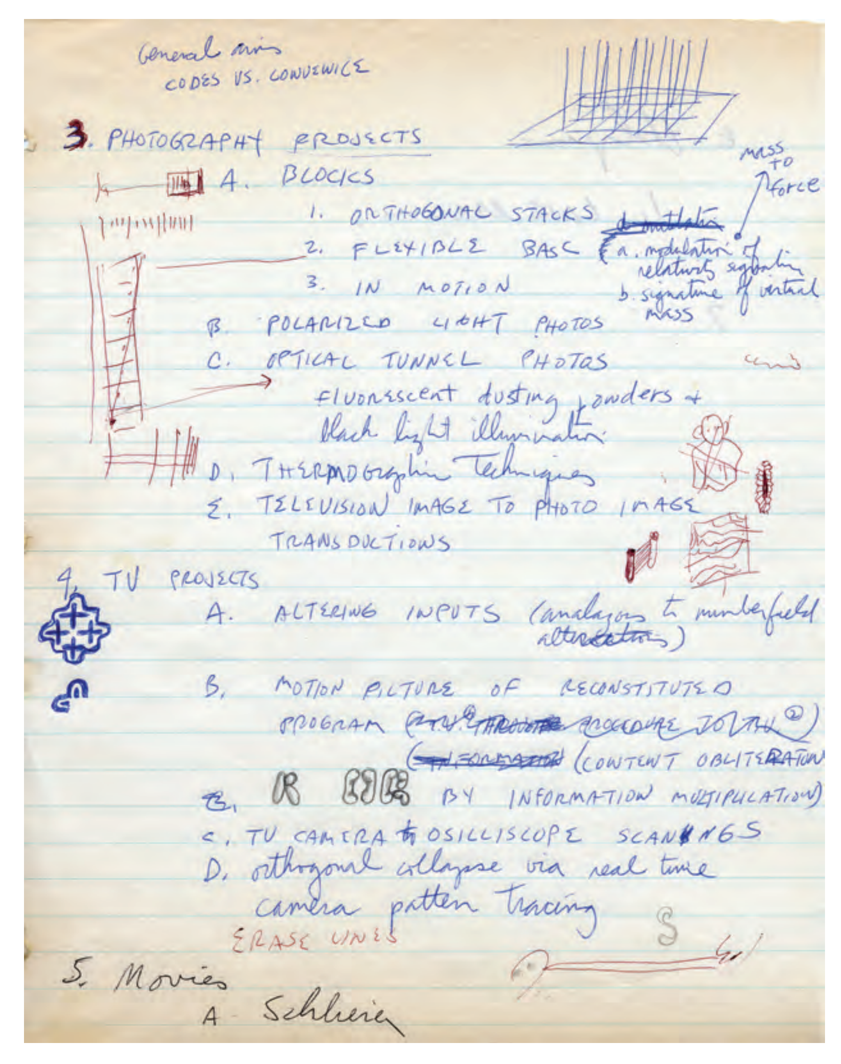
Bochner's prescience about the ontological destabilization of photography that still haunts discussions of digital photography today:

> One of my projects was to feed numbers into the computer and the computers would generate permutations of those numbers which would be printed out as photographs. . . . Unfortunately . . . they didn't have the technology to do it. The programmer told me, 'do you know what, you can make these faster by hand than I can' because, in 1968, he couldn't write a complex enough program. . . . That sort of washed out the one project I had intended to do there. So after that we sat around for three months just talking.[44]

As early as 1968, then, Bochner had determined to produce photographs directly from a computer's permutation of numeric code. Constrained by the technology available to him at the time, he could not realize his plans. However, he was able to foresee that it would be possible. At issue here is the way in which digital

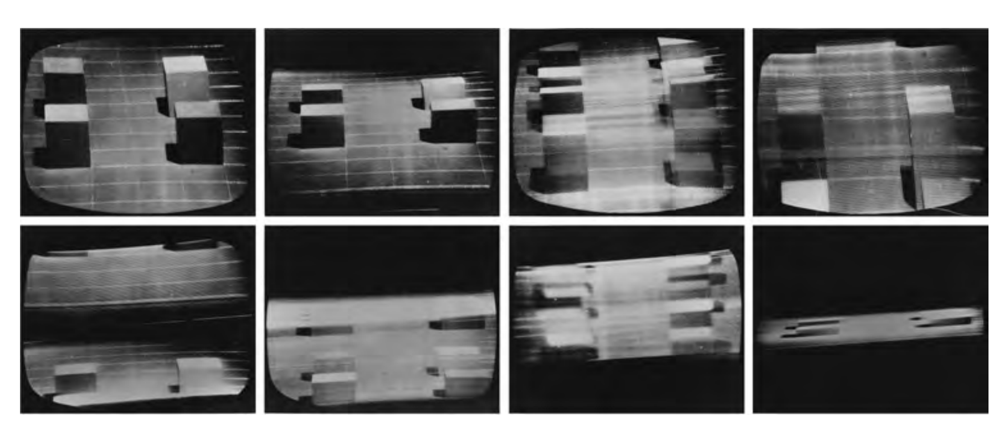


7 Mel Bochner, *Transparent and Opaque*, 1968. Twelve silver dye bleach prints, 16 × 20 inches each. Photo: © Mel Bochner.



8 Mel Bochner, *The Singer Notes (Sheet 3)*, 1968. Ink and pencil on paper, 11 × 8.5 inches. Photo: © Mel Bochner.

photography seems to render questionable Barthes' claim that photography 'accomplishes the unheard-of identification of reality ("*that-has-been*") with truth'.[45] Today of course it is possible to produce, from scratch, an entirely digital 'photographic' image, one that doesn't have any relation to 'reality' in the sense Barthes intended. Bochner anticipated this development, albeit via the parodic simulation of abstract photographs. Bernard Stiegler, working in a more deconstructive mode, has similarly questioned the kind of photographic ontology that Barthes takes for granted, and so, too, its implications for the relation between analogue and digital photographs. Stiegler argues that the photograph never bore an unproblematic relation to the 'that-has-been', and, consequently, that this was never a way to secure an ontological specificity for photography: 'the digitalization of the analog destabilizes our knowledge of the this was, and we are afraid of this. But we were afraid of the analog, too: in the first photographs, we saw



9 Mel Bochner, *Roll*, 1968. Eight gelatin silver prints, 20 × 24 inches each. Photo: © Mel Bochner.

phantoms.'[46] Frustrated though Bochner was with the technological limitations of early computing, his claim that he 'sat around for three months just talking' during the remainder of his Singer placement is an exaggeration.[47] Exploring the boundaries between different image media, he attempted some primitive video to photography 'transductions' as can be seen in the series *Roll* (1968) (plate 9). Here Bochner trained a video camera on four wooden blocks set out in a square formation on a grid. He then modulated the vertical hold on the video monitor displaying the shot. By photographing the monitor he was able to capture the heavy 'ghosting' effect that he had produced. In lieu of producing his proto-digital photographs, Bochner focused on the 'phantoms' that haunted analogue visual media. In so doing, he anticipated Stiegler's insight that the photograph, pre-digitalization, always already destabilized our knowledge of the 'this was'. It was, however, the way in which Bochner concluded his Singer placement that was also to conclude his photographic practice in a notably emphatic way.

MOVING IN VICIOUS CIRCLES

The third card from *Misunderstandings* is apparently a negative of Bochner's own hand and forearm, laid alongside a 12″ marker. On closer examination, it becomes apparent that this card features an impossible image. Looking more attentively at the border around the 'negative', it is revealed as the frame of a Polaroid. Paradoxically then, the image declares itself to be the negative of a positive, that is, a negative-less, photographic process. No longer a misunderstanding, this card presents an outright dissimulation. It is the most blatant forgery in the pack and, as such, acts as *Misunderstandings*' 'tell', the clue to revealing Bochner's theoretical hand. This image card from *Misunderstandings* is in fact an uncropped version of Bochner's earlier work *Actual Size (Hand)* (1968) made as he came to the end of his Singer Lab placement. *Actual Size (Hand)* was originally shot as a Polaroid by one of the Singer technicians. It was later re-photographed in order to generate the cropped print without the Polaroid's distinctive frame. It is only the impossible 'negative' aspect of the Polaroid on the *Misunderstandings* card that is faked.[48]

Following the failure of the Singer scientists to realize his plans for abstract, computer-generated photographs, Bochner's subsequent conversations with them moved on to problems in information theory. These conversations were often to



10 Mel Bochner, *Singer Lab Measurement #4*, 1968. Gelatin silver print, 10 × 8 inches. Photo: © Mel Bochner.

centre on the idea of objectification and how artist and scientist could find a common language. This led to discussion of quantification and measurement. 'It was', says Bochner, 'about how experience can be communicated, and at the same time, the fallibility of every measurement system.'[49] Such discussions stimulated the artist's earliest measurement works, modest Letraset and tape interventions within the Singer Labs (plate 10). For Bochner, there was a conundrum lurking within these works. Having had the Letraset and tape interventions photographed in order to record them, he realized that there was no way to determine the actual size of the objects featured in the photographs; they were scaleless even though they contained a scale. So Bochner started to include parts of his own body in subsequent photographs of his measurement interventions, using them as an identifiable referent to guarantee the integrity of the scale. A printer was then instructed to print the 12″ ruled marks in the resulting images to exactly

twelve inches, that is, to print the scale, and thus also Bochner's body parts, at actual size.

This convoluted process resulted in *Actual Size (Face and Hand)* (1968) (plate 11), works that held profound significance for Bochner: 'the photograph became the index of the index, or a vicious circle. That, for me, was the end of photography.'[50] This attempt to produce a true 1:1 ratio, to make a perfectly indexical depiction, resulted paradoxically only in the generation of an index (the photograph) of an index (the scale alongside Bochner's head or hand). Bochner considered this situation a 'vicious circle' because the apparent solution to the problem of producing 'true' photographic indexicality only produced a further problem, the recursive production of an 'index of an index', and thus demonstrated that the original problem (the attempt to achieve true indexicality) was fatally intractable, since the ontological referent always escapes. In fact, the situation is more recursive even than Bochner acknowledges. *Actual Size (Face and Hand)* is in fact the index (the photographic print) of an index (the negative produced by re-photographing the original Polaroid taken by the Lab technicians) of an index (the original Polaroid) of an index (the scale). By the time Bochner has had it lithographically printed as the image card in *Misunderstandings*, the chain or recursion has become even more extended.

Bochner's *Actual Size (Face and Hand)* goes further than Victor Burgin's superficially similar *Photopath* (1967), executed a year earlier. Burgin had also produced a work at precise 1:1 scale, laying photographs of gallery floorboards directly over the same floorboards but printing them in black and white so that the distinction between the floor and the photographs was clearly evident. Having recently returned from a postgraduate year at Yale studying with Robert Morris, Burgin was at this point working at the far edge of minimalist concerns. Investigating the boundary between the photograph as the most minimal possible 'specific object' (the limit case of literalism) led him to a concern with photography itself as a cultural form (the beginnings of Burgin's interest in semiotics). In contrast, Bochner, starting from a similar postminimalist point, believed, as early as 1968, that he had undermined the ontological ground of the photograph. Here Bochner's early concern with the 'phenomenology of the photograph' tipped over into its deconstruction.[51] Whether Bochner's emphasis on recursive chains of indexicality actually 'deconstructs' photography is open to question since the recursive chain still terminates in an index. Difference is deferred but not indefinitely. Nevertheless, Bochner's work certainly destabilizes the claim to straightforward indexicality with which photography has long, if problematically, been associated.[52] This was enough to convince the artist that the putative 'transparency' of photography was deeply problematic and in this sense analogous to Derrida's concern with the 'transparency' of language to thought.

Here Bochner can be brought into a final productive contradiction with Wall. What Wall has to say about photography's relation to conceptual art sits at the very heart of the debate on photoconceptualism:

> Dragging its heavy burden of depiction, photography could not follow pure, or linguistic, conceptualism all the way to the frontier. It cannot provide the experience of the negation of experience, but must continue to provide the experience of depiction, of the Picture. It is possible that the fundamental shock that photography caused was to have provided a depiction

> which could be experienced more the way the visible world is experienced than had ever been possible previously. A photograph therefore shows its subject by means of showing what experience is like; in that sense it provides 'an experience of experience', and it defines this as the significance of depiction.[53]

It is with this qualification that Wall introduces his rationale for the promotion of photography as a turn *away* from the 'reductivism' of conceptual art. Yet Wall's affirmative account of photography's production of the 'experience of experience' sits awkwardly with Bochner's demonstration of photography as an 'index of an index'. For Bochner this 'vicious circle' led him to the end of photography rather than its affirmation.

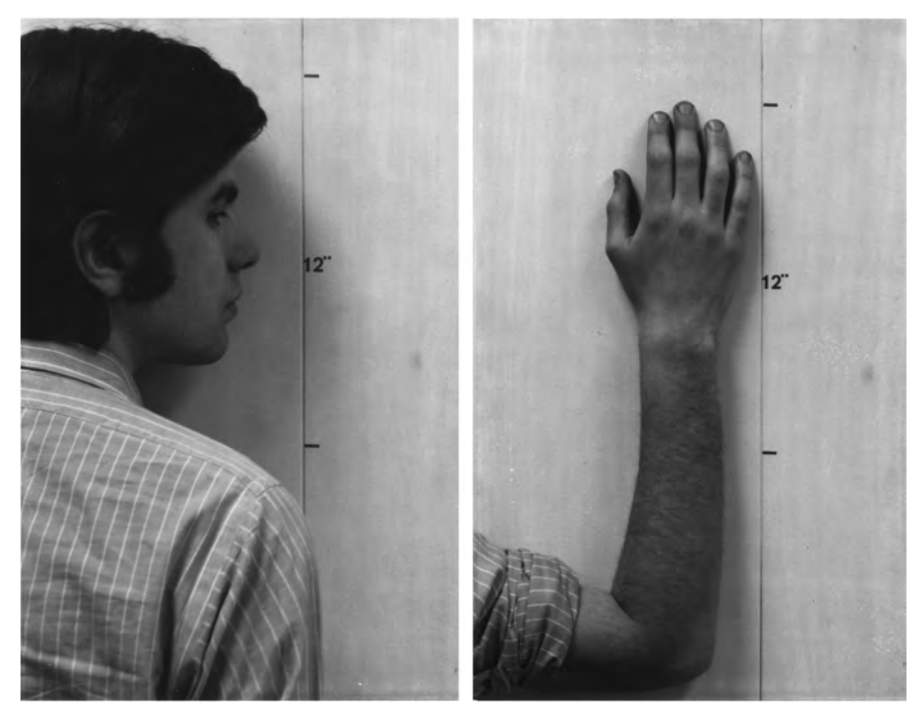
Bochner's 'theory' of photography proceeds by negation, that is, via a specification of what photography is *not*, rather than by the development of an account based on positive terms. Bochner's photographic work thus dovetails with his 'theory' of painting and sculpture, all of which challenged the ontological security of *art* as conceived by formalist modernism, that is, as secured by medium-specific characteristics. Reflecting on and explaining his *Theory* series, Bochner stated that it was:

> derived from the hypothesis that every process presupposes a system. Any particular endeavour I have chosen for investigation consists of a set of internal principles of development (its practice). The 'art' is the demonstration of the network of supports that forms the system, the knowledge of it, in it.[54]

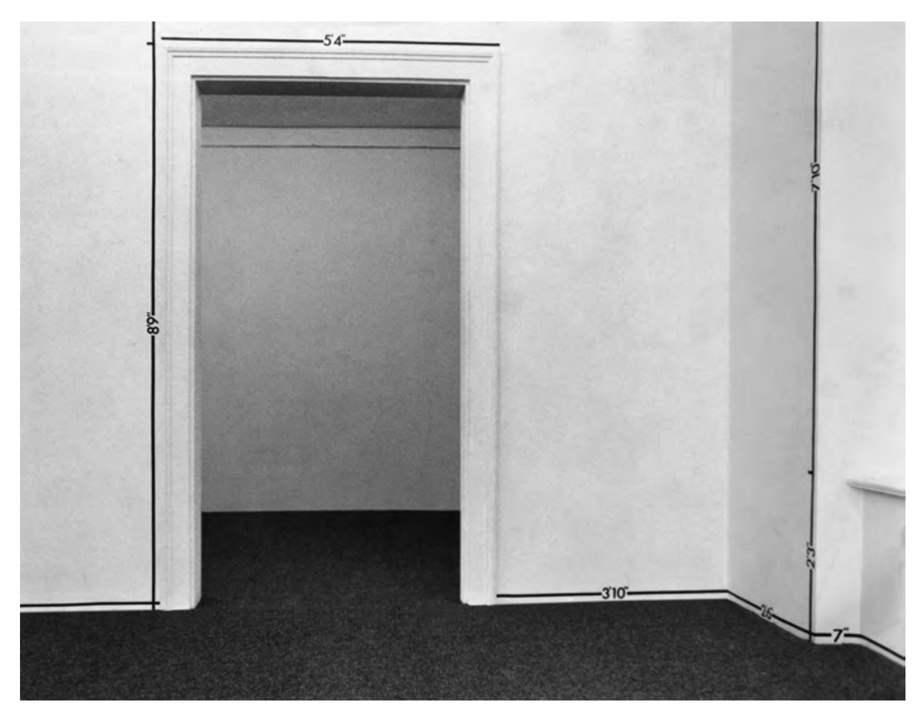
Bochner thus mobilized photography's 'anti-art' status self-reflexively as a resource *within* a wider set of strategies of anti-art art production contemporary with conceptual art. Bochner's photographic work formed a part of a wider theoretical investigation into the ontology of art, and in this sense his early work can be considered conceptual. Recovering Bochner's generic conception of art as 'the demonstration of the network of supports that forms the system [of art]' clearly indicates that he once articulated a post-medium conception of art.

Much of the ground for Bochner's articulation of this post-medium position is prepared in his photographic work. Bochner recognizes that the ontology of photography is, as Peter Osborne has claimed, distributional 'without any single, underlying ontologically fundamental basis to its unity'.[55] Thus there is nothing irreducibly specific to photography that would serve to make it a medium in the sense outlined by Greenberg and developed by Fried.[56] As Bochner explains: 'the "groundlessness" of the quotations became the equivalent of the "groundlessness" of photography itself, focusing attention on the artificiality of any framing device.'[57] Bochner's theory of photography thus constitutes a neglected moment in conceptual art's negation of medium and an anticipation of contemporary, digitally inflected, challenges to photography's ontological security.

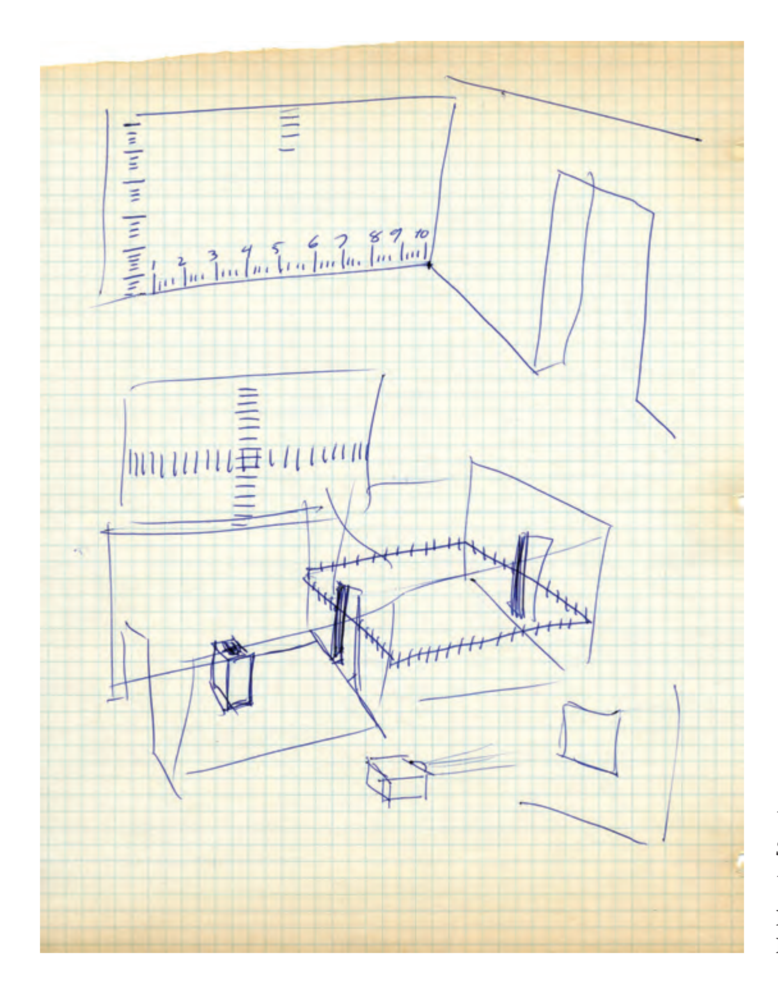
After producing his *Singer Labs Measurement* series, Bochner moved on to make his renowned *Measurement Room* (1969) series (plate 12). Though these works were documented photographically, it is the measurements themselves that, within the gallery context, constitute the work. This transition was clearly envisaged while Bochner was on his Singer placement and are in fact a consequence of it, as can be seen from a key page in *The Singer Notes* which sketches out plans for room-



11 Mel Bochner, *Actual Size (Face and Hand)*, 1968. Two gelatin silver prints, 22 × 14.25 inches each. Photo: © Mel Bochner.



12 Mel Bochner, *Measurement Room*, 1969. Tape and letraset on wall, size determined by installation. Installation: Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Munich, 1969. Photo: © Mel Bochner.



13 Mel Bochner, *The Singer Notes (Sheet 43)*, 1968. Ink on graph paper, 11 × 8.5 inches. Photo: © Mel Bochner.

scale measurement works (plate 13). For Bochner the end of photography inspired direct intervention in the traditional context of art. Bochner negated photography with an incipient art of context. The systematic investigation of the 'network of supports that forms the system' of a given medium was sublated by the beginnings of a systematic investigation of the art system itself.

PAINTING AFTER PHOTOCONCEPTUALISM

Bochner's experiment with an art of context was short-lived, however. He became dissatisfied with working on the ontological grounds and ontological boundaries of art by systematic means, and returned to canvas-based painting in 1973 via a transitional phase of wall painting. That is, Bochner started painting again just as his contemporaries, most notably Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke and Michael Asher, were honing their critique of the very institutions where Bochner's new paintings would be exhibited.

Bochner continues to paint today. In a well-known interview, James Meyer has interrogated Bochner on his return to painting. Meyer inquires in the bluntest terms 'how can you defend making paintings now?'[58] Bochner responds that all of his previous work should be understood as a preparation for his return to

painting, stating that 'without the history of the practice of painting as the background for all my work, it becomes a series of disparate gestures.'[59] Later in the interview, Bochner goes even further, 'I always thought of myself as a painter . . . a painter who just didn't happen to paint', and concludes, 'but what I can see in retrospect is that it's the absence of painting that gives definition to the *Photo Pieces*, the *Measurements*, the *Theory of Boundaries*. They all circulated around that missing signifier.'[60]

A combative Meyer, avowedly 'sympathetic to . . . the discourse of painting's insufficiency', objects to Bochner's claim, implying that it could be read as revisionist: 'your work became well known for its investigation of systemic thought . . . Even your wall paintings of the' '70s and early' '80s were systemically derived. Your current work is not, and I'm wondering whether it hasn't betrayed the anti-subjectivist, anti-compositional commitments of your early work and writings.'[61] Bochner defends his position with the claim that 'the system predicted the result. It was tautological – a closed as opposed to an open investigation.'[62] Consequently, 'there were two choices: totally abandon the visual or see if I could renegotiate the terms of painting . . . One goes to painting *because* of its conventions. I'm interested in painting as a text that is continually rewritten.'[63] Yet, as Meyer objects, the problem for Bochner, after conceptual art, is why exclusively, or even primarily, paint? Why fall back on 'conventions' that have been undermined? This standoff between Bochner and Meyer is not resolved within the context of the interview.

Yet is not painting once again a 'good idea'? Such a question cannot be answered in the abstract. In Bochner's case, a local case would need to be built, entirely based on his practice, demonstrating that his particular return to painting was productive. Bochner negates painting by photography and photography by an art of context, only to return to painting. Thus his position seems to go back on the gains made within the terms of his own project. His later work apparently takes it for granted that painting, *qua* painting, is art '*because* of its conventions'. Here then, Bochner would seem to concur with Wall's renewed faith in the contemporary claims of canonical art. Furthermore, Bochner's more recent paintings seem to exhibit little of the anxiety about the medium and its history that is so manifest in other significant painters, such as Gerhard Richter or Luc Tuymans. Unless, that is, it could be demonstrated that Bochner adheres to his post-medium concept of art in his return to painting. In this case painting would be a 'good *idea*', the conceptual content of the work would secure its status as art, not its relation to the history of the medium. In this sense Bochner would, *pace* Verwoert, be a *post*-conceptual painter.

> Those painterly paintings I did . . . I realized that I was walking on the edge of an abyss. I knew how easily they could be misunderstood, and they were. But that was not my problem. I had an idea and I owed it to the idea to see where it would take me.[64]

Notes

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the final form of this chapter, in particular Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen. Sincere thanks are also due to Mel Bochner and Scott Rothkopf who graciously agreed to let me interview them. An AHRC Doctoral award has supported my work.

1 'I do not like the term "conceptual art". Connotations of an easy dichotomy with perception are obvious and inappropriate.' Mel Bochner, 'Excerpts from speculation', *Artforum*, May 1970, 70–3, 70.

2 The series comprises monthly talks held at the United Nations Plaza, Berlin, beginning in October 2008 and continuing at the time of writing.

3 The major exception here is Scott Rothkopf's pioneering study of Bochner's photographic practice. My chapter is indebted to it both as a source and as an inspiration. I have aimed to develop and extend some of the important issues it raises. Scott Rothkopf, '"Photography cannot record abstract ideas" and other misunderstandings', Mel Bochner, *Photographs: 1966*–1969, New Haven and London, 2002, 1–49.

4 'As a critique of medium ... the impact of conceptual art continues to be felt across the whole field of current art practices.' Peter Osborne, *Conceptual Art*, London, 2002, 47. Previous returns to painting, such as the neo-expressionism of the 1980s, have predominantly staked their claim *against* the achievements of conceptual art and the post-conceptual practices descended from it.

5 E-flux email announcement, 29 September 2008.

6 Jeff Wall, '"Marks of indifference": aspects of photography in, or as, conceptual art', in Jeff Wall, *Selected Essays and Interviews*, New York, 2007, 143–68, 149.

7 Mel Bochner in conversation with the author, 24 March 2008.

8 Hans Ulrich Obrist and Sandra Antelo-Suarez, 'Interview with Mel Bochner', http://www.e-flux.com/projects/do_it/notes/interview/i003_text.html., retrieved 22 March 2008.

9 Obrist and Antelo-Suarez, 'Interview with Mel Bochner'.

10 Obrist and Antelo-Suarez, 'Interview with Mel Bochner'. Bochner has added a caveat to this claim in a previously unpublished commentary on *Misunderstandings* from 2000 included in his recently published collected writings: 'the writings on photography of Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes had not yet been translated'. Mel Bochner, 'Misunderstandings (a theory of photography) (1967–1970)', in Mel Bochner, *Solar System and Rest Rooms: Writings and Interviews, 1965–2007*, Cambridge, MA, 2007.

11 Obrist and Antelo-Suarez, 'Interview with Mel Bochner'.

12 Bochner, in collaboration with Robert Smithson, had established the precedent for this form of artistic intervention into print media with *The Domain of the Great Bear* (1966). Mel Bochner and Robert Smithson, 'The domain of the Great Bear', *Art Voices*, Fall 1966, 44–51.

13 Obrist and Antelo-Suarez, 'Interview with Mel Bochner'.

14 Bochner, *Solar System* 180.

15 Bochner, *Solar System* 180.

16 Although Bochner has given 1969 as the official start date of the *Theory* series, he dates *Misunderstandings* as starting in 1967. This suggests *Misunderstandings* may have held generative significance for the series as a whole. 'The series generically entitled *Theory* was begun in 1969 . . . 'Mel Bochner, 'Three statements for Data Magazine', 1972. Reproduced in *Solar System*, 96–101, 98.

17 The works in question are *Four Comments Concerning: Photograph-Blocks* (1967), *Actual Size (Hand)* (1968) and *Photography Cannot Record Abstract Ideas* (1969).

18 '[T]he unbound, envelope format was chosen to subvert any implication of a beginning, a middle, or an end (at least in that order).' Bochner, *Solar System*, 180. The three cards in question are the image card, and the cards featuring the Duchamp and the Britannica citations.

19 Bochner, *Solar System*, 180.

20 Jonathan Benthell made an early, and plausible, guess at the fakes suggesting that the Mao, Proust and Merleau-Ponty quotations were Bochner's invention. Jonathan Benthell, 'Bochner and photography', *Studio International*, April 1971, 147–8, 148.

21 The full quotation reads: 'you know exactly how I feel about photography. I would like to see it make people despise painting until something else will make photography unbearable.' Marcel Duchamp, 'Letter to Stieglitz', in Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, eds, *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, New York, 1973, 165.

22 'Depictive arts' is Wall's term. See 'Depiction, object, event', *Afterall*, 16, Autumn/Winter 2007, 5–17, passim.

23 Wall, 'Depiction, object, event', 8.

24 Wall, 'Depiction, object, event', 8.

25 John Roberts has elaborated on photo-conceptualism's enmity to modernist values, asserting that 'Photography was the means by which conceptual art's exit from Modernist closure was made realisable as practice.' John Roberts, *The Impossible Document: Photography and Conceptual Art in Britain 1966–1976*, London, 1997, 9. Roberts perhaps overstates the case here since conceptual art proposed more than one means of exit but his emphasis on the importance, and perhaps even the priority, of photography is well made.

26 Wall, '"Marks of indifference"', 144. The two 'directions' that Wall names are 'photo-documentation' and 'amateurization'.

27 Certainly such work has not been undertaken by Wall, who seems to put more distance between himself and the legacy of conceptual art by the day. This is perhaps most pointedly indicated by the *Stereo* controversy, namely Wall's decision to alter *Stereo* (1980), so that what was originally a diptych (comprising separate image and text panels) is now exhibited without the text panel. This decision has been interpreted as emblematic of Wall's decision to distance himself from his early engagement with conceptual art. Wall's response to this critique has been to deny its validity in a rather unpersuasive manner: 'the sign side was always too bright. I never figured

out a way to make it less bright. I always disliked the imbalance, so I asked the owners of the panel to remove it.' See, Jeff Wall, 'Art after photography, after conceptual art: Jeff Wall interviewed by Peter Osborne', *Radical Philosophy*, 150, July/August 2008, 36–51, 40–1.

28 See, symptomatically, Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, New Haven and London, 2008.

29 Wall, 'Art after photography', 44.

30 The scare-quotes on 'artification' are Jeff Wall's. See Wall, '"Marks of indifference"', 149.

31 It is not by chance that Bochner should have chosen the Britannica. In order to check the veracity of this citation the scholar would have to take up the labyrinthine challenge of working through the entire back history of the Britannica from the date of the first entry on photography. This is so extensive that even the British Library does not hold the complete set of all relevant editions. This may well be intentionally ironic in that nothing hangs on whether or not this particular citation is faked; all that matters is that we know that three may be.

32 Wall, '"Marks of indifference"', 144.

33 Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist painting', in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, Chicago, 1995.

34 Greenberg, 'Four photographers: review of *A Vision of Paris* by Eugène-Auguste Atget; *A Life in Photography* by Edward Steichen; *The World Through My Eyes* by Andreas Feninger; and *Photographs by Cartier-Bresson*, introduced by Lincoln Kirstein', *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 4, 183–7, 183.

35 Greenberg, 'Seeing with insight: review of *Norm and Form* by E. H. Gombrich', *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 4, 258.

36 Roberts, *The Impossible Document*, 38.

37 Roberts, *The Impossible Document*, 38.

38 This oversight is perhaps attributable to Roberts' focus on the achievements of British photoconceptualism.

39 Rothkopf, '"Photography cannot record abstract ideas"', 1–49.

40 Bochner expressed his original desire for 'objectivity' in photography as follows: 'Any time I became involved in the craft aspect, there was the danger of looking old fashioned. By using the fabrication techniques of minimalism, it gave me a certain objectivity.' Bochner, as cited in Rothkopf, '"Photography cannot record abstract ideas"', 10.

41 'Yet photography itself was of little interest to most conceptual artists, producing a situation in which critical agency is given to the photographic image without photography becoming theoretically self-conscious as a medium.' Roberts, *The Impossible Document*, 9.

42 Wall, '"Marks of indifference"', 167.

43 Obrist and Antelo-Suarez, 'Interview with Mel Bochner'.

44 Obrist and Antelo-Suarez, 'Interview with Mel Bochner'.

45 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, London, 2000, 113.

46 Bernard Stiegler, 'The discrete image', in Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek, Cambridge, 2002, 147–63, 152.

47 Obrist and Antelo-Suarez, 'Interview with Mel Bochner'.

48 Mel Bochner in conversation with the author, 24 March 2008.

49 Obrist and Antelo-Suarez, 'Interview with Mel Bochner'.

50 Obrist and Antelo-Suarez, 'Interview with Mel Bochner'.

51 Bochner, 'Misunderstandings', 180. The artist has described the work as a 'deconstruction' of photography. Mel Bochner in conversation with the author, 24 March 2008.

52 For a detailed discussion of the issues surrounding the concept of indexicality in photography see the transcript of a roundtable discussion featuring Jan Baetens, Diarmuid Costello, James Elkins, Jonathan Friday, Margaret Iversen, Sabine Kriebel, Margaret Olin, Graham Smith and Joel Snyder, in James Elkins, ed., *Photography Theory*, London and New York, 2007, 130–55.

53 Wall, '"Marks of indifference"', 167.

54 Bochner, 'Three Statements for Data Magazine', 98, 100.

55 Peter Osborne, 'Photography in an expanding field: distributive unity and dominant form', in David Green, ed., *Where is the Photograph?*, Kent and Brighton, 2003, 63–70, 63.

56 For an account of the concept of medium-specificity and its problems, see Diarmuid Costello, 'On the very idea of a "specific" medium: Michael Fried and Stanley Cavell on painting and photography as arts', *Critical Inquiry*, Winter 2008, 274–312.

57 Bochner, 'Misunderstandings', 180.

58 'How can you defend making paintings now? A conversation between Mel Bochner and James Meyer', in Philip Armstrong, Laura Lisbon and Stephen Melville, eds, *As Painting: Division and Displacement*, Cambridge, MA and London, 2001, 199–204. Bochner includes a reprint of this interview in *Solar System*, 158–66.

59 'How can you defend making paintings now?', 199.

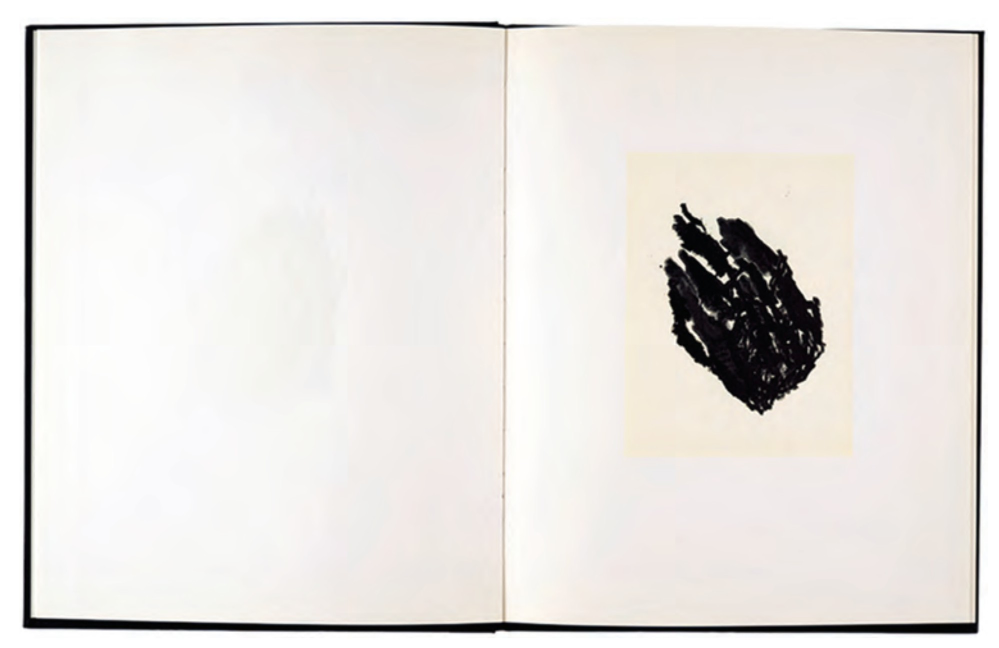
60 'How can you defend making paintings now?', 203.

61 'How can you defend making paintings now?', 199, 203.

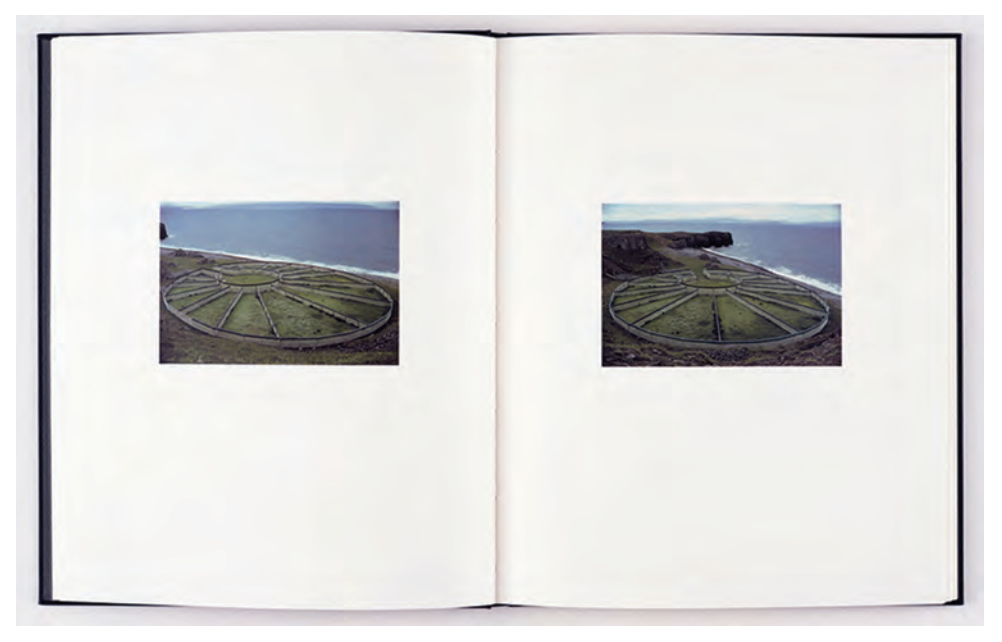
62 'How can you defend making paintings now?', 204.

63 'How can you defend making paintings now?', 201.

64 Phong Bui, 'In conversation: Mel Bochner with Phong Bui', http://www.brooklynrail.org/2006/05/art/in-conversation-mel-bochner-with-phong-bui, retrieved 22 March 2008.



1 Roni Horn, Book I: *Bluff Life*, from *To Place*, 1990–2007, as published in *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*, Göttingen, 2009. Photo: © Roni Horn, 2009/Hermann Feldhaus.



2 Roni Horn, Book II: *Folds*, from *To Place*, 1990–2007, as published in *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*, Göttingen, 2009. Photo: © Roni Horn, 2009/Hermann Feldhaus.

 Photography after Conceptual Art Edited by Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen
 ISBN: 978-1-444-33360-2

7

RONI HORN'S ICELANDIC ENCYCLOPEDIA

MARK GODFREY

INTRODUCTION: RONI HORN AND PHOTOGRAPHY AFTER CONCEPTUAL ART

A: You are standing in front of a photograph of the surface of a dirty river. Flecks of light glint off the brown wavelets, and here and there, you pick out small white numbers directing you to a series of compact footnotes that flow beneath the image. You follow the river of texts as they describe the history of the Thames and your experience of water, and every now and then address 'you' as you read. You break to look back at the water, finding more numbers, glancing down and then up then down again.

B: You are faced with a grid of photographs, forty-eight snapshots of a young girl smiling, frowning, pulling faces. She is on the brink of adulthood, and seems to play different characters in the shots. Turning around you see another panel of her pictures. They feel familiar: the images are in pairs, but each part of a pair is slightly different, the girl changing her expression between two photos taken moments apart. You turn back to the first panel to check the differences but, unable to compare the pairs side by side, you attempt to recall details of the shots as you move between one grid and the other.

C: You enter a room whose plush red walls are adorned with pairs of photographs showing the backs of birds' heads. Photographed against a bright white background, their feathers are pristine and intensely detailed; nothing could have moved during the shot. The setting and the stillness suggest that the birds must have been dead, but this is hard to verify since they are turned away. You find the creatures as sinister as the birds that populate Hitchcock movies but the artist has also transformed them, dissolving their avian identity by concealing eyes and beaks.

These situations describe three photographic installations by Roni Horn: *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* from 1998; *This is Me, This is You* from 2000; and *Bird* from 2007. In the context of this volume's discussion of photography after conceptual art, we could begin by distinguishing these serial works from the work of Jeff Wall and Andreas Gursky, whose monumental single images exemplify a new kind of post-conceptual pictorial photography. For Michael Fried, their pictures 'appear to deny the presence before them of the beholder, or to put this more affirmatively, to establish the ontological fiction that the beholder does not exist';[1] Horn, by contrast, directly incorporates the viewer in the work creating a physical space for their experience and addressing them in her texts. But does Horn continue the formal, theoretical, and material concerns of conceptual

photography? The signs suggest so: *Still Water (the River Thames, for Example)* could be seen to extend the interplay of text and image in the work of Robert Smithson. *This is Me, This is You* might recall Douglas Huebler's critique of singular portrait photography, and the ways in which he encouraged his subjects to play games before the camera; *Bird* could be read as a self-reflexive work, an allegory of photography since the work concerns the medium's ability to produce uncanny doubles and its propensity to render its subjects deathly still. In one project, Horn employs skilled photographers (*Still Water*) as did Mel Bochner when he made *36 Diagrams and 12 Photographs* (1966), in the next, (*This is Me, This is You*), she works with 'deskilled' snapshots as did Dan Graham in *Homes for America* (also 1966). For her, it all depends on the conceptual demands of the work.

However, despite the formal connections between Horn's photographic work and conceptual art, closer attention to Horn's practice would suggest that, just as it can be distinguished from the counter-tradition associated with pictorial single-image photography, it can also be set apart from conceptualism and its legacies in the expanded field of photography. One place to begin making this case would be Horn's earliest published photograph, *From a Gold Field (Surface structure)*, a black and white close-up of her now famous sculpture *Gold Field*, an ultra-thin sheet of gold foil measuring approximately a metre-and-a-half square, placed directly upon the floor. Made in 1982, and published the following year, the photograph has a remarkable resemblance to James Welling's foil photographs from 1980 (the photographs are pretty much identical). Yet whilst Welling produced photographs of foils to interrogate the status of the photograph, questioning its (in)ability to produce abstract images and our propensity to view a crumpled surface as a landscape, Horn was using the black and white picture to reinterpret *Gold Field*, drawing attention to its topography rather than to its substance. The photograph was a tool put to use to think about sculpture.

Following this distinction between Horn and Welling, one can continue to drive wedges between Horn's practice and that of her contemporaries. Though she started to show her work around the time of the 'Pictures' exhibition (1977), Horn was not interested in representation and photography's function in the image world. She has contested problematic ways of categorizing identity, but has rarely occupied herself with *photography*'s role in the construction of subjectivity, as have artists such as Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger, whose connection to feminist politics is far more overt. Horn sometimes photographs particularly resonant settings, for instance, the views from the windows of Emily Dickinson's Amherst home, but is uninterested in using photography to forge narratives about places and history, as have figures such as Martha Rosler or more recently Matthew Buckingham. Horn has taken photographs of tourists and of tourist venues, but is neither critiquing the tourist gaze nor appropriating the 'tourist photograph' to send-up high art photography, as is the case with contemporaries Peter Fischli and David Weiss. Horn is neither very bothered with the different textures of analogue and digital photography, nor with the theoretical implications of the transition from one technology to another: these have been the concerns of artists such as Tacita Dean and Zoe Leonard.

In short, Horn seems relatively indifferent to photography's histories, its materiality and technologies, its functions in the wider world, and its theoretical or philosophical status as an index or a copy. Instead, photography, the photographic book, and the photographic installation are just other idioms that Horn has used in a practice whose mediums are diverse, yet whose subjects are concentrated: experience,

identity, and place. Even though Horn uses photography extremely precisely, and neither in multimedia installations nor in combination with other mediums, photography per se is simply not her worry. Photography is a means to an end, not an end in itself. This puts a huge gulf between her photographic work and that of other prominent artists who directly address the situation of photography after conceptual art.

In what follows, I want to look closely at the work of Horn's which includes the greatest number of photographs – four hundred and one, to be precise. This is a series of nine books published since 1990 collectively titled *To Place* whose subject, in Horn's terms, is the 'relationship between identity and place'.[2] The volumes, which together constitute one of the most important groups of artists' books since Ed Ruscha's 1960s books and Bernd and Hilla Becher's publications on industrial architecture, take Iceland and Horn's relationship to it as their ostensible focus. Iceland is a setting which enables her to 'taste experience'[3] and to feel placed, and it appeals because it is constantly changing. The books and the photographs within them suggest the possibility of a kind of identity in a perpetual state of becoming, and yet one that is firmly rooted in and by the world. This paradoxical concept of identity lies at the very heart of Horn's thinking, and while it is one that emerges perhaps from a sculptor's sensibility, it is a concept that exceeds the realms of the sculptural. Being open to mutability, and at the same time being placed, describe ways of thinking and behaving as well as a spatial relationship with the world.

While this concept of identity is at the core of the series *To Place* rather than issues about photography, Horn nonetheless has had to engage questions about this medium. These include photography's role in archiving and creating orders and categories of information, its status as a medium whether distinct from, or related to, other mediums; its traditional genres; its history in the context of artist's books; its temporal identity as a still image; and the part it plays in the tourist industry. These issues are obviously pertinent to the wider project of photography after conceptual art, and I will endeavour to show how Horn works though them, and how, in so doing, she builds on the concerns of photo-conceptualism even whilst distancing her approach from other artists. But – to press the point – however much Horn has had to address these photographic questions, they are only subsidiary matters that she has had to confront on the way to making a work which is really about becoming and being placed.

A FLUID ENCYCLOPAEDIA

Horn once called *To Place* an 'Icelandic encyclopaedia',[4] referring (albeit with a degree of humour) to a kind of publication whose very job is to provide what she called 'a collection of knowledge'.[5] Encyclopedias define and compartmentalize information, and they share this function with photography, which has historically been an instrument put to use to order and classify visual information. Horn, however, resists the very idea of definition. 'Things don't have exclusive names and fixed identities',[6] she has said – a comment that coheres with her longstanding critique of forms of definition and compartmentalization such as conventional binary understandings of gender identities.[7] Horn understands the world – constituted by things, people, identities, landscapes and ideas – as mutable and active, not fixed, and her attraction to Iceland has derived from the fact that this is a particularly fluid place: 'Iceland is always becoming what it will be, and what it will be is not a fixed thing either.'[8] Given her antipathy to defi-

nition, and the associated attraction to Iceland, the question that arises about *To Place* is why Horn would have chosen to make an encyclopedia comprising volumes of photographs when this approach to knowledge was anathema to her, and even more of an anathema to the representation of Iceland? I want to start my account of *To Place* by looking at the way in which Horn uses the photographic book's capacity to isolate and compartmentalize information against itself and how she puts this facility to work in order to produce a sense of mutability.

Bluff Life, volume one of *To Place*, was published in 1990. Like all but the most recent two volumes, it is a black, clothbound hardback book measuring 81/2 by 101/2 inches. The word 'Ísland' appears embossed towards the top of the front cover above the name 'Roni Horn'. *Bluff Life* is the only volume in which photography plays a subsidiary role, for the book contains reproductions of thirteen watercolour and graphite drawings produced in 1982 during a two month stay in a lighthouse off the southern coast of Iceland (see plate 1). At the back of the book, however, there is a single photograph of a seascape. The photograph is bisected between a rippled black sea and misty white sky, but the indistinct horizon line suggests a day when the boundary between water and air was blurred.

Folds followed *Bluff Life* the following year, and marked the real entry of photography into the series. Folds are structures used to separate flocks of sheep after they have been let out to pasture over the summer, and Horn gathered thirty-six images of folds at twenty-four locations and arranged them over twice as many pages, with blank pages somewhat randomly interspersed (see plate 2). It becomes clear looking at the book how important the material texture of the book was for the artist. Horn chose to print the photographs on uncoated paper, which makes them feel integrated into the very substance of the book. She explains that she wanted to 'minimize the descriptive value of the image and place the emphasis on atmosphere'. 'When you print on uncoated paper', she continues, 'the ink, instead of sitting on the surface, is absorbed into the paper and mitigates the flat, graphic nature of the printed image. While you gain atmosphere or presence when you print this way, you also lose detail, contrast, a certain clarity.'[9] Certainly the folds look atmospheric, all the more so because they are pictured as lonely structures against wide empty landscapes: the oldest look like abandoned ancient settlements.

Lava (1992) begins with four double page spreads in which the names of Iceland's volcanic eruptions are arranged in a grid. Horn randomly collected lumps of lava from various volcanic fields across Iceland and brought them to her studio in New York where she placed them on a light table and had them shot by a professional photographer (see plate 3). The lava appears in the book mostly one lump to a page, but sometimes several tiny chunks spread across the paper. Although they are reproduced actual size, they seem singular and monumental. The rocks appear as surfaces as much as solids, and the lack of depth throws attention on their jagged and astonishingly irregular outlines. Each surface is itself a landscape of darkened holes and illuminated craters: these rocks contain rather than cast shadows. Photographed in this way, and excerpted from the vast fields of lava deposits of their island context where they exist in huge profusion, Horn's chunks become exquisite individual specimens of long-gone volcanic activity. After the photographs, the names of the eruptions reappear, first arranged as they would be on a map of Iceland; and next run into each other on two densely printed pages where they appear like bricks in a wall of language. Finally there are pages which identify the

lava fields from where each of the photographed rocks was taken. Horn printed with letterpress, using lead type to press the letters into the paper so they would be 'physically, not just graphically, located on the page'. As she noted 'the book's text components carry the same weight as the photographic components.'[10]

Pooling Waters from 1994 comprises two parts. The first collects images of hot pots, swimming pools, springs, and industrial plants powered by underground water sources (see plate 4). There are also interiors showing empty and full swimming pools and the locker rooms that surround them. Bathers and tourists appear in some outdoor shots but never very prominently – the focus is rather on the pool and its setting in the landscape. The pictures are slightly bigger on the page than those in *Folds* and are certainly more detailed, for in this volume, Horn used coated paper to increase the definition of the images. Accompanying this is *Pooling Waters Volume 2*, a collection of texts by Horn recounting her experiences in Iceland, printed first in English and then in Icelandic, and interspersed with occasional black and white images of odd flying-saucer shaped clouds, a unique feature of the Icelandic skyscape.

These first four books of *To Place* seem to be regular volumes of an encyclopedia. The external design stays constant, and their internal make-up is highly distinctive: each book includes a separate body of material, namely (i) drawings, (ii) sheep folds, (iii) lava chunks, (iv a) hot pools, (iv b) texts and clouds. However, the volumes do not read like a regular run of encyclopedic volumes, and nor do the images appear like successive components of a standard archive, because the mode of the delivery of information changes from one book to the next. Thematically, there is no apparent logic connecting the *Bluff Life* drawings to the *Folds* photographs – no reason why a series of pictures of lava follows, nor why the next volume is devoted to hot water. Drawings are followed by landscapes, then studio photographs, then more landscapes, and then black and white cloud compositions. The first volumes of *To Place* gather information and images, and indeed archive some of the most notable elements of the Icelandic landscape, but the suggestion is that each volume of photographs is always partial, always fragmentary, and will never capture the full identity of Iceland. The images in *Lava* are emblematic of the project as a whole: Iceland can only be represented in fragments, through luxurious debris that is debris nonetheless. What accumulates is a mass of extractions, rather than a slowly unfolding vision of any stable totality, a progression towards incompletion.[11] *To Place* is not only a fragmentary but a fluid encyclopedia, its volumes like new tributaries joining a long river and each new volume changes the identity of the whole by inflecting the memory of those proceeding it.

For all that they feature single subjects, the opening volumes of *To Place* actually unravel conventions associated with photographic archives and encyclopedias. In this respect, Horn's project in *To Place* has something in common with many photo-conceptualist works which borrowed the forms of the archive. Think, for instance, of all those projects which collected photographs of a single subject and which, in so doing, critique the culture of administration: Christian Boltanski's *The Clothes of François C* (1972); Charles Ray's *All My Clothes* (1973); and Hans-Peter Feldman's *A Woman's Complete Wardrobe* (1974), to name just one group of works linked by subject. But Horn's series is distinctive: each individual subject is *carefully* determined rather than chosen for its banality, and is given serious treatment (for instance, each sheep fold and each lava chunk is identified); it is the *links* between one group and the next that defy the conventions of an archive, having no basis other than in Horn's



3 Roni Horn, Book III: *Lava*, from *To Place*, 1990–2007, as published in *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*, Göttingen, 2009. Photo: © Roni Horn, 2009/Hermann Feldhaus.



4 Roni Horn, Book IV: *Pooling Waters, vol. 1*, from *To Place*, 1990–2007, as published in *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*, Göttingen, 2009. Photo: © Roni Horn, 2009/Hermann Feldhaus.



5 Roni Horn, Book V: *Verne's Journey*, from *To Place*, 1990–2007, as published in *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*, Göttingen, 2009. Photo: © Roni Horn, 2009/Hermann Feldhaus.



6 Roni Horn, Book VI: *Haraldsóttir*, from *To Place*, 1990–2007, as published in *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*, Göttingen, 2009. Photo: © Roni Horn, 2009/Hermann Feldhaus.

experience and desire. Horn's anecdotes, which appear in the second part of *Pooling Waters*, do even more to undo the constraints of the archive. One passage reports how Horn got stuck out in a severe storm and took shelter by the wall of a sheep fold.[12] Another describes her nighttime motorcycle journey to a hot pool which she bathed in alone.[13] A third recounts her cooking dinner beside a field of 'plush gray-green lava'.[14] Unlike the objective and depersonalized texts that featured in so many photo-conceptual works, and that often parodied the conventions of journalistic writing, Horn's are carefully written, personal, and deeply felt. It is impossible to shake the affect of these texts from the memory of the previous photographs in the previous volumes: words stick to images though never as would captions or textual explanations. The lava lumps, the folds, and the pools become features of a landscape touched by Horn's encounters with them.

The ambition to disturb archival and encyclopedic conventions continues with the fifth volume of *To Place*, *Verne's Journey* (1995). Unlike the easily identifiable sheep folds, hot pools, or lava chunks, here the opening image defies recognition. The next page is a close-up of the last, but the identity or scale of the image becomes no clearer. We could be looking at a splat of bird shit on a rock; in fact, this is an aerial view of a glacier. There follows a sequence of fifteen photographs of the Snaefellsjokull peninsula, two similarly sized blurry seascapes like the one in *Bluff Life*, and finally a series of five spreads echoing the beginning of the book. The first shows a turbulent Maelstrom, the next, a blown-up detail of it, spread out to fill a double page (see plate 5). Looking at the third and fourth images, enlarged pictures of the previous ones, Cézanne's account of Courbet's painting of 1869, *The Wave*, comes to mind. Cézanne remarked that standing in front of the pictures, the spray seemed to splash into the room:[15] the effect of Horn's whirlpool images is as intense, but the direction is reversed. As we reach the end of *Verne's Journey* we appear to travel inwards to the centre of the swirling vortex.

The way in which photographs are arranged in *Verne's Journey* creates an experience for the reader/viewer closer to reading fiction, rather than to surveying an archive. Where each picture in the previous three volumes is neatly separated from its neighbouring ones, *Verne's Journey* begins and ends with sequences of unidentifiable images that provoke imagination and draw in the reader with the movement of the zoom. Sequenced in this way, the images become more dramatic, but Horn was also interested in replacing Verne's fantastical representation of Iceland with a real account of its terrain. Making the book, she set out to discover 'a landscape that already existed in fiction, just as Verne invented a fiction that already existed in Iceland'.[16] She gathered and made photographs relating to the setting of *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* and in the place of Verne's imaginary terrain with its exploding volcanoes and dust storms, she supplied images that show the 'exceptionally mundane'[17] geological realities that existed at the site of his story's setting. The final image is the heart of a whirlpool, but in accordance with her intention, the zoom also makes the Maelstrom appear as so much plain swirling water becoming ink on paper. If the book explores the differences between an imagined and physically encountered landscape, its presentation of that landscape oscillates between the extraordinary and the mundane.

Even after considering only the first five volumes of *To Place*, it is clear that Horn never understood the encyclopedia as an orderly or objective 'collection of knowledge'. Her encyclopedia is closer to Borges' ancient Chinese encyclopedia of animals divided into 'Those that belong to the Emperor', 'Embalmed ones', 'Those

that are trained', 'Suckling Pigs', and so on.[18] In the context of a discussion of conceptual art, though there is a large gap between Horn's anti-archive and those that proliferated in the photo-conceptualism of the early 1970s, the non-photographic work by Alighiero E Boetti, *Classifying the thousand longest rivers in the world* (1970–77) seems a close precedent. Boetti compiled this encyclopedia only to expose how ludicrous it was to measure fluid forms whose breadth and length is always changing: Horn's Iceland is akin to Boetti's rivers. In another of her interviews, Horn remembered researching Iceland before her initial visit and finding the island 'situated in the encyclopaedia between ice hockey and ice skating'.[19] A sense of randomness can prevail even in the most ordered of informational forms because alphabetic sequence establishes bizarrely inappropriate juxtapositions. *To Place* adopts the form of an encyclopedia only to explore its tendency to produce unexpected connections, and to contest the very idea of definition.

BECOMING

As is already evident, photography is the primary medium of *To Place*, although the books also feature watercolour and graphite drawings and typographic works. However, rather than listing the various mediums present in *To Place* in this conventional way, we would do better to attend to the ways in which Horn works against the notion of medium specificity. This principle was rooted in modernist theory, but remained compelling to many artists of later generations including the photo-conceptualists who were deeply concerned with the properties of photography – Mel Bochner making works about the distortions of the camera lens; John Hilliard and Jan Dibbets looking at camera settings, and so on. Horn approaches the idea of the medium in a completely different way, not to explore a medium's individual character, but to let its identity change into that of another medium.

Texts form drawings. Photographs can also be drawings: Horn has described the lava photographs as drawings, a claim that becomes clearer when the pictures are seen in the context of the condensed, heavily worked forms of the *Bluff Life* drawings. These drawings also emphasize the different physical textures of charcoal and watercolour, and when we think as well of the stone folds and the lava fragments, we could connect the first three volumes of *To Place* in terms of their quasi-sculptural presentations of materials. *Lava* could also be seen as another kind of sculpture. The book in some ways functions like the containers Robert Smithson fabricated to store the stones he picked up in New Jersey and brought to New York galleries – Horn's book is a kind of 'non-site' with Iceland as 'site'. One medium can become like another, and this idea plays out again in *Verne's Journey* where photography shares the conventions of cinema, both in the opening and closing sequences, which mime the progression of a zoom in a film, and in the central sequence where aerial 'establishing' shots cut to photographs taken on the ground.[20] The last image of *Verne's Journey* could also be understood as a drawing, for here the photograph loses its identity as a detail of a maelstrom and becomes material, an ink on paper drawing.

Horn also complicates the definitions of the classical genres of landscape and portraiture throughout *To Place*, letting one become the other. These genres were of course established within the history of painting, but have also governed the history of photography. Even in conceptual photography, these genres remained separate. Artists such as Douglas Huebler did all they could to challenge the conventions of landscape photography, and of portrait photography, but they did not seek to fold

one genre into the other. Horn, by contrast, undoes these genre distinctions, allowing a face to become a landscape, and a landscape to seem like a kind of face.

Haraldsdóttir, 1996, the sixth volume of *To Place*, features sixty-one photographs of a young woman called Margrét taken over a six week period in the summer of 1994 (see plate 6).[21] Horn travelled around Iceland with Margrét, presumably visiting many of the outdoor pools pictured in *Pooling Waters*. At each spot, Margrét disrobed, no matter what the weather, and Horn photographed her, neck up in the water, quite close up. The photographs are arranged in six alternating black and white, and colour, sequences. There are several double page spreads where Margrét appears on both sides of the gutter; elsewhere there is a blank left or right page. As well as the very dramatic breaks from duotone to colour and back, subtle differences animate the sequences: Margrét shifts from left to right in the frame, and is sometimes cropped so close that her face fills the page; elsewhere she recedes slightly so more of the pool's surface appears around her. The book reads like a series of symphonic movements. When, in the central colour section, Margrét opens her lips for the first time, it is like a sudden burst of sound. An eerier chord is struck later as in the last colour sequence, the mist between camera and subject bleaches colour out, softening the contours of Margrét's face as though a veil fell between her and the page. Thierry de Duve has addressed *You are the Weather*, the installation which derived from this book, thinking about the ways in which the viewer is addressed by Margrét as she seems to implore them to say what they desire from her image.[22] *Haraldsdóttir* produces an even more intimate encounter with the subject, especially since, when holding certain spreads of the volume up in two hands, two Margréts appear life-size and close-by facing the single reader.

Horn was interested in the way in which Margrét's features and expressions changed in different climactic conditions, as she bathed in bright sunlight, fierce wind, biting cold and in mist; at the same time, she was careful to crop the photographs so as mostly to withhold direct information about these shifting weather conditions. By repeating the subject (Margrét) whilst allowing the book to show a huge range of changes in her appearance, Horn managed to make a series of portraits that are in fact not quite portraits, but instead indirect representations of landscape. The reader/viewer realizes after some pages that the images in *Haraldsdóttir* are not providing information about Margrét's mood or character or class or profession, as most portraits aim to do; instead, her face alters as a pure effect of the Icelandic landscape and climate. A face becomes a register of the weather, and this is one of the ways in which the genre of portraiture becomes landscape in *Haraldsdóttir*; another is the way in which Margrét's face itself becomes a landscape. After viewing repeated yet ever-changing images of her features, the face loses its identity and we grow to think of her skin as a terrain; eyes and nose as landmarks. In Horn's words, 'the face becomes the place.'[23]

In the three volumes of *To Place* following *Haraldsdóttir*, distinctions between landscape and portraiture unravel in new ways. *Arctic Circles* is a collection of seventy-two photographs made in the north of Iceland, and records, in Horn's words, 'a collection of cyclical and circular events'.[24] Horn visited a couple living in a landscape touching the arctic circle whose work involved the gathering of eider feathers from nests laid down by the birds. As well as being interested in geographic circles and the natural cycles of the birds' and the couple's labour and life, she was also taken the fact that in this remote corner of Iceland, the couple's



7 Roni Horn, Book VII: *Arctic Circles*, from *To Place*, 1990–2007, as published in *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*, Göttingen, 2009. Photo: © Roni Horn, 2009/Hermann Feldhaus.

main entertainment came from an American soap opera with its cyclical narrative structures. She photographed head shots of the couple in black and white and colour, also picturing their TV screen, their working room, and the nests and flocks of eider birds (see plate 7). Pictures of the seascape looking towards the Arctic horizon punctuate the book, but each cut in half and set against a blank facing page, seemingly a way of letting the photographic layout acknowledge the frustration of Horn's desire to see, in a panoramic view, the line of the Arctic Circle itself. As the book unfolds, each of its component elements repeats but they never coalesce: never are the couple pictured at work, for instance, nor watching their TV. The creased faces of the elderly couple suggest a landscape again – ones weathered by and attuned to this hostile landscape. Yet the main way in which *Arctic Circles* confronts traditional separations of the genres of landscape and portraiture is by representing the interdependence of couple and the landscape. The book argues in its own way that the two cannot be thought apart: remarkably, this point is made without picturing the couple and the landscape together.

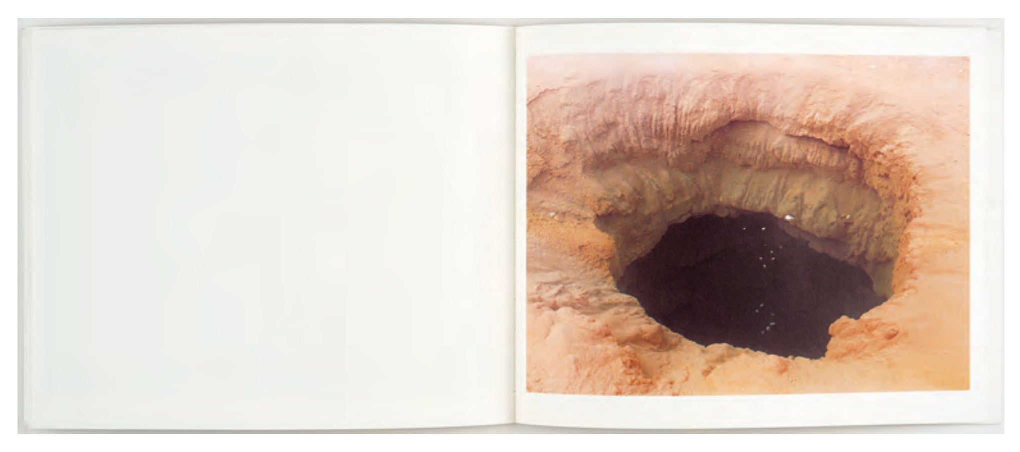
Becoming a Landscape separates the component parts of *Haraldsdóttir*, and also marks the first departure from the format of the previous books in the series. Horn produced two books, formatted for the first time in landscape, held together in a slipcase. Each presents a sequence of close-up shots of the surface of bubbling hot pools interspersed with studio shots of an androgynous child's face (see plates 8 and 9). The photographs in each book are nearly identical, but small differences reveal that they were taken moments apart. Most obviously, the juxtaposition of the child's face and the bubbling pools creates a connection between the portraits and the landscapes, between pre-teenage life (when identity is fluid and unfixed) and the Icelandic geology. Like the child, Iceland is 'becoming'. Portraiture is connected to landscape in



8 Roni Horn, Book VIII: *Becoming a Landscape*, from *To Place*, 1990–2007, as published in *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*, Göttingen, 2009. Photo: © Roni Horn, 2009/Hermann Feldhaus.

terms of subject matter in *Becoming a Landscape*, but another kind of merging occurs on its pages as one genre becomes the other. The child's face becomes a kind of smoothly contoured landscape; the pools meanwhile begin to resemble eyes, navels, and other bodily orifices. Partly this is because the reader/viewer looks at them whilst also looking at an actual body; partly it is because of a trick of orientation: Horn pointed the camera forward to picture the upright child, and downwards to photograph the horizontal surface of the pools, but arranged both kinds of images on the same plane, thereby allowing their difference to be elided as one becomes the other.

'Iceland is always becoming what it will be, and what it will be is not a fixed thing either.' As we have seen, Horn's intuition about Iceland is expressed through her treatment of the subjects, mediums, and genres of *To Place*. More than any other philosophy, her approach to becoming as a state to be valued in itself rather than as a progressive and temporary movement from one state to another echoes Deleuze's. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze argues that 'to become is not to progress or regress along a series . . . . becoming is not an evolution.' Becoming instead 'concerns alliance' – 'every becoming is a coexistence' . . . . 'Becoming is the movement by which the line frees itself from the point, and renders points indiscernible.'[25] As Cliff Stagnoll has shown, Deleuze 'use[d] the term "becoming" to describe the continual production of difference immanent within the constitution of events, whether physical or otherwise. Becoming is the pure movement evident in changes *between* particular events. This is not to say that becoming represents a phase between two stages, or a range of terms or states through which something might pass on its journey to another state. Rather than a product, final or interim, becoming is the very dynamism of change, situated between heterogeneous terms and tending towards no particular goal.'[26] Instead of making one medium into a second so that it fully takes on the other's identity, or allowing one genre to take on the features of another in a secure and solid way, Horn explores the very *process* of becoming in itself. In the flow between the subjects of its volumes, in the way one medium becomes another, and in the manner in which a landscape becomes a portrait and a portrait, a landscape, *To Place* can be seen as a work that explores 'the very dynamism of change'. As we shall now see, this dynamism also characterizes Horn's approach to the physical form of the book.



9 Roni Horn, Book VIII: *Becoming a Landscape*, from *To Place*, 1990–2007, as published in *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*, Göttingen, 2009. Photo: © Roni Horn, 2009/Hermann Feldhaus.

INTIMATE ACTIVITY

In many accounts of the place of photography in conceptual art, critics have thought about images without paying sufficient attention to their mode of presentation. Yet a famous photograph of 'Artists and Photographs', the seminal edition published by Multiples Gallery in 1969, shows that each artist chose a different support for their images: photographs were presented on index cards (Mel Bochner), in envelopes (Sol LeWitt; Douglas Huebler), on a folding poster (Robert Morris), on postcards (Andy Warhol), and, in the case of Ed Ruscha, in a book. Even cursory attention to the latter's books would reveal that he thought as much about subjects (gas stations, swimming pools) as about how they would be published. The photographs are sequenced and sized, with carefully determined borders, and blank pages inserted between images. The format of the book was also crucial: depending on the ideas for the work, Ruscha would use a standard binding, a ring binding, or a concertina of pages. The format of the book was chosen as the artist worked out how he wanted the photographs to appear in it, but another determining factor was the kind of physical (and affective) relationship Ruscha wanted to create between the viewer/reader and the book. Once, in a lecture about his photography of the 1960s, Ruscha showed a photograph in which he held one of his books in his hands. More than the content of the photos on its pages, the slide drew attention to the fact that Ruscha treated the book as an object, an intimate hand-held *thing*. I now want to turn attention to the ways in which Horn has used the book form in *To Place*, asking how she has extended some of these (perhaps under-acknowledged) concerns of artists of the 1960s. How has Horn approached the dynamic between the image and its carrier (the book), de-familiarizing the way in which a reader/viewer encounters the photographic material within? How has she structured the relationship between photograph, book, and reader to create a physical, intimate, active, and affective experience?

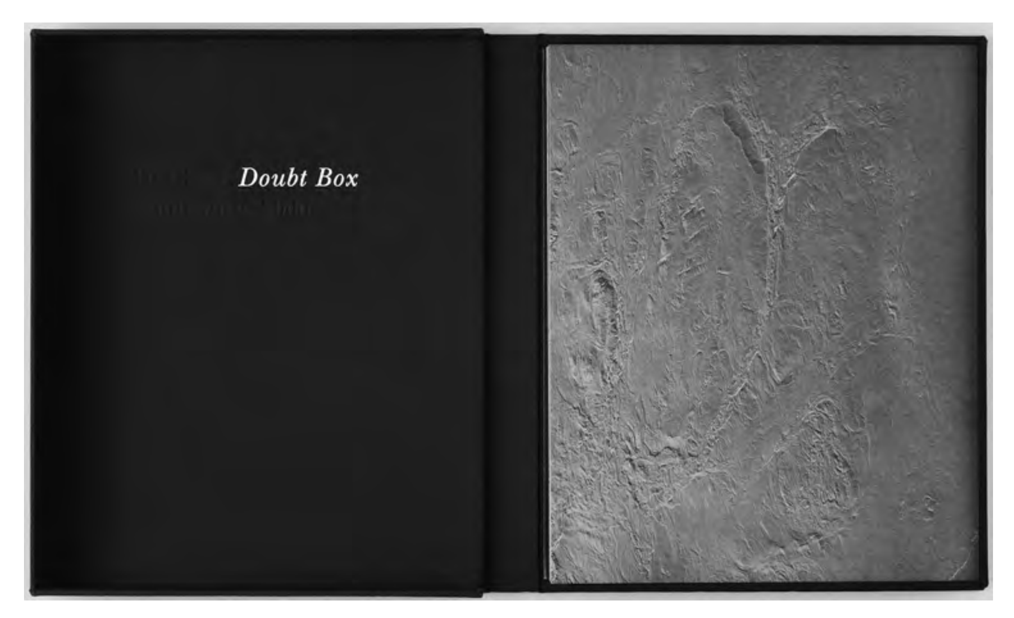
Horn's books are larger than Ruscha's but actually feel at once luxurious and humble; indeed their form creates a dynamic of humility and luxury. The uniform black covers look quiet, all the more austere in the context of other books which sell themselves with brash cover images. Because of their austerity, the exquisitely printed reproductions on the pages inside appear all the more dramatic. This

dynamic of outside and inside raises the intimacy of the encounter between reader and object: turning over the black hard covers to reach the first pages, the reader feels invited into an almost secret world.[27] The first volumes of *To Place* created an affective and sensual experience as well as presenting a sequence of images, and as the series progressed, Horn found ways to complicate and extend this experience.

In *Arctic Circles*, Horn took another route with the book form, creating what could be described as a circular labyrinth for the viewer. Of all the books in *To Place*, this is the one whose content most approximates the idea of a photo-essay, for it concentrates on a single setting and we see people, their landscape, their labour, and their house. It was perhaps because she was working with what could seem a particular ethnographic subject that Horn needed to be all the more adamant in her refusal to create a narrative or make a coherent presentation of a theme as in the traditions of the photo-essay. As we have already seen, Horn separates out the components of *Arctic Circles*. As well as this, for the first time in the series *To Place* she uses photographic repetition and reflection, reprinting the very same images at different places in the book and flipping some around (for instance, those of a dead snowy owl). Horn deploys techniques specific to photography but not to produce any kind of meditation on the medium. Instead she creates a feeling of déjà vu for the reader so that the idea of cycles and repetitions, explored in the images of the book, is extended to the register of affect.[28]

Arctic Circles makes for a particular and unfamiliar reading experience, sometimes confusing, sometimes quite meditative: the book activates the reader's attention, and this principle is extended in *Becoming a Landscape*. One takes the first volume from the case and pages through it; then puts it down to take up the second. Soon one senses that though the sequencing of images in the books is identical (six hot springs; a face; seven more hot springs, the same face), there are differences between the paired pictures because Horn photographed the same subject twice with a slight delay between one exposure and the next. The 'twitch of time'[29] between Horn's two photographic exposures becomes analogous to the time between the two separated moments of viewing them in the two books. Rather than allowing her readers to 'lose all sense of time in a book', through her use of photographic doubling and temporality, Horn hyper-sensitizes them even to the tiniest fragments of time.

The latest instalment of *To Place* is *Doubt Box* and here Horn deconstructs the architecture of the book completely.[30] *Doubt Box* is literally a black box inside which is a stack of twenty-eight cards, each printed on both sides (see plate 10). The child from *Becoming a Landscape* reappears, now clearly a boy in the midst of his teenage years, with soft stubble and acne marking his once smooth face. Most cards have images of the surface of a silvery and thick glacial river. Now and again you reveal a misty scene of small icebergs; rarer still appear bird heads with dead glass eyes fixing your stare. There is no prescribed way to read this volume, just as there is no set way to arrange a pack of playing cards. The viewer can spread the cards before them and invent games; they can riffle through the stack one way up; view each card in turn, flipping over each one; or shuffle cards together. The subjects are restricted to four main types, yet infinite permutations of images become possible. Previously, Horn had managed to sequence images in such a way that the viewer had an experience that was not simply determined by which image followed the last; in *Doubt Box*, by contrast, Horn relinquishes the control of photographic sequence entirely, and opens the book to chance.



10 Roni Horn, Book IX: *Doubt Box*, from *To Place*, 1990–2007, as published in *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*, Göttingen, 2009. Photo: © Roni Horn, 2009/Hermann Feldhaus.

ICELAND IS A VERB

To Place is an anti-archive of shifting focus where mediums and genres become one another; it is a series of volumes where the idea of a volume is undone to allow for sensual and active encounters. It should now be clear both how Horn builds on and away from the concerns of photo-conceptualism in this project, and how she continues her own career-long commitment to questioning traditional modes of categorization, division, and documentation, while also generating intimate and diverse kinds of experience. However, we are yet to reach the real heart of *To Place*, the central idea that drives the project. This idea is a paradox of the kind that Horn is drawn to: Iceland is both a place of 'becoming' *and* a place where she feels centred. It is a landscape of flux and a place where she feels securely placed. To understand the importance of this latter claim we need to go back to the very start of Horn's encounter with Iceland.

When Horn first arrived in Iceland, in the mid-1970s, she left behind the materials that she had worked with in the sculpture department at Rhode Island School of Design, but did take with her a camera. 'I could spend part of my time photographing the island', she supposed. 'After a few days there I tried to take a photograph. But with my attempt to distinguish the first shot, the place disappeared on me. Photography – or really doing anything much more than just being in a place – requires the imposition of a whole other consciousness. I hadn't been in Iceland long enough to simply be there.' She continued:

> On the first visit Iceland was still a fantasy to me, still too unknown. All the dazzling features, of which there are many, isolated themselves. It took months just to get past this veneer of sensationalism and picture-postcard possibilities . . . . It was obvious that photography was going to interfere with my interests and that I didn't have it in my power to take the pictures I

> wanted to take anyway. I put my equipment in a locker in the bus station in Reykjavik and took off for four months.[31]

It was only after experiencing Iceland without a camera over this and many subsequent visits that Horn finally reconciled herself to making photographs. By this time, she was clear of the value Iceland held for her, and it had little to do with the plenitude of exciting scenery. Iceland, she had realized, worked for her in an active experiential way. 'I come here to place myself in the world', Horn later wrote. 'Iceland is a verb and its action is to center.'[32] The language of infinitives recalls the words of Richard Serra's 1967 *Verb List*, presumably a text Horn would have encountered during her sculptural education. Concerned, like Serra, with experience, not images, Horn discovered that Iceland was valuable because of the activities it enabled: to place, to centre. Yet these experiences exceeded the realm of the sculptural that was Serra's concern. 'Iceland is the place where I have the clearest view of myself and my relationship to the world. By clearest view, I mean a view that is not constricted by social conventions.'[33]

Horn's book series is called *To Place* because Iceland's role has been 'to place' her in the world. Once we acknowledge this, it becomes clear why her project cannot simply involve photographing Iceland's landscape and collecting images into a series of books: such publications would merely be a souvenir of a country which happens to have had an effect on her. It is also clear why Horn has been unconcerned with 'critiquing' the tourist image of Iceland or representing it through anti-spectacular images, such as those found in Dieter Roth's monumental work *Reykjavik Slides* (1973–95 and 1990–93), an installation of 30,000 slides of every single building in the capital: such critique is beside the point. Rather than creating or refusing beautiful images of Iceland, Horn has endeavoured to show *how* it is that the country places her. But she has also endeavoured to place her viewer. Iceland has to continue to be a verb in these books, and herein lies Horn's challenge, for photography, in capturing and stilling a subject, usually makes it a noun.

Most obviously, Horn shows how Iceland places her by making photographs which cause us to think about how she was physically placed in and by the landscape. We get a sense that the structures in *Folds*, for instance, were photographed by someone up on the nearest slope (a clearer view could have been achieved with an aerial photograph, but such a picture would not tell us that the photographer had been in the presence of the fold). Horn, we intuit, must have been alone and the experience of walking in the landscape would have been intense. We also *feel* this because our situation in viewing the book rhymes with hers: holding the book we too are alone, so a kind of chain forms between us, the camera, and the photographic subject. *Lava* contains completely different kinds of images, but likewise, it shows how Iceland places Horn, since it 'share[s] something of the feel of the island without depicting it'.[34] Instead of producing dramatic and picturesque views of lava fields, Horn offers her viewer an exquisite and tactile sense of volcanic debris.

Iceland also places Horn by making her aware of kinds of time that are rarely experienced in cities such as her own. For instance, in Iceland the passage of time is not so much registered by shifts in hours, or from light to dark; time is registered in ever-shifting weather. In Iceland too the duration of human life can seem connected to the duration of planetary life, as glacial and volcanic activity reveal the very formation of the earth. Horn's books place their viewers in Icelandic time

– in the changing weather of *Haraldsdóttir* and in the bubbling waters of *Pooling Waters* and *Becoming a Landscape*.

Another facet of what Horn means by the title 'To Place' is revealed through an aphorism Horn published in 1983: 'The island: a reflecting pool'.[35] Later she explained that 'My image of Iceland as a reflecting pool is the idea of using nature as mirror and measure. It's an understanding of oneself through a knowledge of what real, not imposed, limitations are. My experience and the ice-and-ash desert interior of Iceland provide an especially accurate reflection. The desert is a mirror. It's a self-sufficient, self-contained environment. It gives nothing. What you take from the desert is who you are more precisely.'[36] Iceland places Horn because it acts like a mirror. By looking into and experiencing it, she has become more aware of herself. As well as illustrating the idea of a reflecting pool, Horn's challenge has been to re-create this effect. 'The book can become a kind of mirror', she hopes.[37]

There are various reflective surfaces in the photographs in *To Place*: some of the pools in *Becoming a Landscape*, for instance. More oddly, reflections glint off the glass eyes of the dead animals in *Arctic Circles* and *Doubt Box*. But Horn develops her concept of Iceland as a reflecting pool most powerfully in the presentation of blank surfaces. Faces and rocks act as these surfaces and most recently in *Doubt Box*, water has fulfilled this role. Stilled by the act of photography, the glacial river loses its fluidity and the silvery, infinitely-creased skin of water takes on new identities. Water seems to thicken even as it ripples and crests, and all sense of scale and of our orientation to the image is lost: each photograph becomes a landscape for the imagination to explore. As readers look at these images, and the repeated surfaces in Horn's other books, they begin to project their own thoughts. The books become the desert in which they find 'who they are', mirrors which they look into to discover their own feelings and ideas.

We can now appreciate the function of surfaces in Horn's photography, and of her refusal to let us imagine that we have access to the interior thoughts of her human or animal subjects. Horn's insistence that photography should only present a surface has nothing to do with the idea of photography that animated Warhol's work; nor is her treatment of surface related to the work of Fischli and Weiss, and their admission that as travelling artists they can only use photography to track the 'visible world'. Horn presents surfaces because it is in Iceland's opaque surfaces that she has found herself; and in the hope that the viewer might do this too. These images do not always let us know exactly what her personal experience of Iceland has been. In fact, they often withhold information about her experience. But it is precisely in this act of withholding, and in their blankness, that they allow us to have an experience that it is akin to hers.

TO LET THE SEA LIE BEFORE ME

Once, discussing her photographs with Lynne Cooke, Horn said 'usually the subject matter of the image is not the subject matter of the work.'[38] So what is 'the subject matter' of *To Place*? I believe it could perhaps be distilled to this formulation: *To Place* is an argument about identity in which the principle of becoming and the necessity of being placed are both paramount. The principle of becoming is posited as one subject flows towards the next; as one medium shares the features of another; as a genre becomes its opposite, and as the books become active forms rather than passive repositories of information and images. The demonstration of being placed involves using photography to show how the artist was situated and situating the

reader too. *To Place* is populated by images in which Horn found a mirror for her thinking and which let the viewer find a place for their own thought as well.

When the two core subjects of *To Place* are finally understood like this, we realize that this series of books is neither just a record of Horn's personal experience, nor an account of this specific location called Iceland. The ramifications of *To Place* are more widespread. To argue and allow for becoming means to confront the division of information into neat orderly categories; to deny social conventions and divisions; to disrupt artistic conventions too. As an argument about being placed, the work stakes a position against the discourse of globalization. It is a counter-argument to the discourse that celebrates the global flow and interchange of people and products, money and information.[39] But what makes these two subjects or arguments most compelling is that they come together when they are usually kept apart. After all, the joys of flux are usually celebrated to counter the idea of being placed; and the argument for being placed is usually a conservative one made by those who seek the comforts of stability. On the very first page of *Bluff Life*, Horn wrote 'to let the sea lie before me', an inkling that it takes dedication to find a sense of fixity in front of something always shifting. To be rooted in the mutable; to let 'becoming' place you: these are the paradoxes that Roni Horn explores in *To Place* and they are ones that have become more and more urgent since the series of books began.

CODA: FROM ICELANDIC ENCYCLOPEDIA TO LIBRARY OF WATER

Since publishing *Doubt Box*, Roni Horn has completed another Icelandic project: the *Library of Water* (see plate 11). It is not another volume of *To Place*, but can nevertheless be seen as the culmination of the work. The title of 'Library' suggests a



11 Roni Horn, Installation shot of *Vatnasafn/Library of Water*, commissioned and produced by Artangel, 2007. Photo: © Roni Horn, 2009.

repository for an 'Encyclopedia', and yet no books are to be found in Horn's installation. Neither are there photographs. Instead, the library archives melted water from ice collected at twenty-four glaciers across Iceland. Horn relishes the absurdity of archiving water but has also acknowledged that this is not merely an exercise in the impossible. There is a very serious impetus for this work: climate change. In a matter of years, some of Iceland's glaciers will have melted, and Horn's installation will be the only repository of ancient waters. *Library of Water* addresses itself to the ecological crisis, and this turn in Horn's concerns merits more discussion than I will devote to the project here; what I want to note in concluding is the relationship with *To Place*, one which cements my contention that questions of photography are only ever peripheral in that series of photographic books. The *Library of Water* seems to me an apt culmination of the books because central to the volumes and to the *Library* are ideas of becoming and of being placed.

Opened in 2007 in the small fishing town of Stykkishólmur, the *Library of Water* is small white building on a hilltop. The installation is housed in a rectangular room abutted by a semi-circular alcove. Windows run most of the way along one of the long sides of the space and arch around the semi-circle. At the side the view opens onto the sea; at the curved end, you can see a panorama of Stykkishólmur, its harbour, a vast bay, and hills, sea, islands, and mountains beyond. Beige rubber tiles carpet the space bearing weather words in English and Icelandic. Rising from floor to ceiling, and dispersed in a random cluster with some outlying individuals, there are twenty-four circular glass columns, each filled with water from the glaciers.

You can see tiny deposits of sediment at the bases of the columns, which are lit from above, but the real drama unfolds with the weather outside the space. Constantly changing light shifts the shadows of the columns around the walls, as the colour of the rubber grows warmer or softens. The columns themselves and the water inside them also change appearance with the weather. Because of their shape and the shape of the room, light from both sets of windows reflects and plays over the glass columns in unpredictable ways. As you move around and through the columns, and particularly when other people enter in the space, this movement of light becomes more dynamic. Your reflected body bends, magnifies, diminishes and disappears; people vanish behind one column, but distort behind others, bodies warping through water and glass. Horn's columns defy the architectural function of bearing loads just as they refuse to regulate space as columns have done in porticos and cathedrals; space flows around these columns which scatter and cluster through the room. Sitting at the table in the alcove, or walking on the rubber floor between and around the columns, you have a sense of everything changing, and you are attuned to the tiniest shifts of light and to the unpredictable expansions and contractions of space. The appearance and the feeling one has of the identity of the installation is in constant flux.

But at the same time, the *Library of Water* creates a powerful sense of place. The installation cannot be imagined or experienced as a hermetic space cut off from the world around it as so many other sculptural installations are. The generous windows bring the view inside and tether the installation precisely to its geographic setting. As you look outside towards the landscape, your view is interrupted here

and there by the columns, but rather than actually blocking out the landscape, these structures repeat and reflect it, so the outside is brought within. The water inside the columns is completely still, and what sedimentation that does occur will never do so before your eyes. The architecture also gives a sense of solidity: however much they change appearance in the light and however irregular their placement, the columns are thick and powerfully proportioned, and their main cluster is a centre for the entire space.

The experience of the *Library of Water* is therefore at once an experience of mutability and of solidity; this is a space of continual 'becoming' and one in which you feel completely centred. The *Library* exists in Iceland but in a way it *is* Iceland for Horn; it works on the visitor as Iceland has worked for her, and as the books and photographs of *To Place* work, too.

Notes

1 Michael Fried, 'Jeff Wall, Wittgenstein, and the Everyday', *Critical Inquiry*, 33, Spring 2007, 500.

2 Horn, 'To Place', in *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*, Göttingen, 2009, 143.

3 Horn, 'Iceland', in *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*, 73.

4 Horn in Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Interviews Volume 1*, Milan, 2003, 433.

5 Horn in 'Weather girls, interview with Collier Schorr', in *Roni Horn*, London, 2000, 124.

6 Horn in Obrist, *Interviews Volume 1*, 440.

7 See in particular her text 'Pronouns detain me' where she writes 'I want a language without pronouns . . . I want to come before gender.' Roni Horn, *Pooling Waters Volume 2*, Cologne, 1994, 61.

8 Roni Horn, *Inner Geography*, Baltimore, 1994.

9 Horn, *Inner Geography*.

10 Horn, *Inner Geography*.

11 With a degree of humour Horn has said that she thinks of 'the maps in *Lava* as combining with the images to form a biography of Iceland' (*Inner Geography*). She was referring to the fact that Iceland has emerged through a series of volcanic eruptions, but the point is surely that she refuses to relate Iceland's biography through a singular narrative or through any one means of representation. Instead, her 'biography' is made of dispersed fragments, and told through of a range of disparate graphic devices.

12 Horn, 'Pastoral and Cave', in *Pooling Waters Volume 2*, 62.

13 Horn, 'Floating in the Desert', *Pooling Waters Volume 2*, 21.

14 Horn, 'Simple and Complete', *Pooling Waters Volume 2*, 29.

15 Cezanne described the impact of the painting as follows: 'One takes it right in the chest, one retreats, the whole room feels the spray.' Cited in *Gustave Courbet*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2008, 292.

16 Horn, 'To Place', 143.

17 Horn, 'Interview with Claudia Spinelli', *Journal of Contemporary Art*, 1995, jca-online.com/horn.html; consulted 12 December 2008.

18 Jorge Luis Borges, 'The analytical language of John Wilkins', in *Other Inquisitions 1937–1952*, Austin, TX, 1993.

19 Horn, 'Interview with Mimi Thompson', *Bomb* magazine, 28, Summer 1989.

20 For a related approach to the idea of mediums and becoming, see George Baker's essay on Anthony McCall's *Solid Light Films*, 'Film Beyond its Limits', in *Anthony McCall*, Mead Art Gallery, Warwick University, 2004.

21 Margrét's surname, which Horn used to title the book, is typically Icelandic since all Icelanders take their second name from the father's first name. This title suggests the Icelandic setting of the photographs even though the country's landscape is out of the frame.

22 Thierry de Duve, 'You are the weather', in *Roni Horn*, 78–85.

23 Horn, 'To Place', 144.

24 Horn, *Roni Horn*, 144.

25 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, London, 1987, 238, 292, 294.

26 Cliff Stagnoll, 'Becoming', in Adrian Parr, ed., *The Deleuze Dictionary*, New York, 2005, 21.

27 On the idea of intimacy, Horn has commented, 'The book is an intimate form, it mostly engages the individual individually. I can think of no other form so inherently private.' Roni Horn, *Inner Geography*.

28 Similarly her decision to photograph television screens has no connection to the concerns of 'Pictures' artists of her generation with their interests in rephotography and the simulacra; these photographs in *Arctic Circles* instead rhyme with other pictures of stuffed animals.

29 Laurence Bossé and Roni Horn, 'Five questions by way of introduction', in *Roni Horn: Events of Relation*, Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2000, 9.

30 One precedent would be Douglas Huebler's *Location Piece 2* from the Multiples Gallery 'Artists and Photographs' edition: Huebler's work was an envelope containing various cards that the viewer could arrange as they chose.

31 Horn, *Inner Geography*.

32 Horn, 'Island and Labyrinth' in *Pooling Waters Volume 2*, 23.

33 Horn, *Inner Geography*.

34 Horn, *Inner Geography*.

35 Horn in *Roni Horn*, Kunstraum München, 1983, 100.

36 Horn, *Inner Geography*.

37 Horn, 'Interview with Claudia Spinelli', *Journal of Contemporary Art*, 1995, jca-online.com/horn.html; consulted 12 December 2008.

38 Lynne Cooke in conversation with Horn in *Roni Horn*, 18.

39 In art, this discourse finds its greatest exponent in Andreas Gursky. His photographs are obviously made all over the world, but more significantly, their elevated viewpoints ask us to imagine that the camera floats over the surface of the world, looking down before moving on.



1 Sherrie Levine, *After Edward Weston (# 5)*, 1980. Black and white photograph, 25.4 × 20.3 cm. Photo: © Sherrie Levine. Courtesy of the Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

 ISBN: 978-1-444-33360-2

8

THOMAS DEMAND, JEFF WALL AND SHERRIE LEVINE: DEFORMING 'PICTURES'

TAMARA TRODD

What are we to make of the return of the 'picture' in photography after conceptual art? Originally associated with the brand of 'critical' or 'oppositional' postmodernism first identified in Douglas Crimp's catalogue essay, 'Pictures', of 1977, the 'picture' has more recently been revived, on the one hand, in practice, in the large-scale, so-called 'pictorialist' photography practised by Andreas Gursky or Thomas Demand, and on the other, in photography theory, in a number of essays published by Jeff Wall.[1] Whilst the contemporary return to the picture might at first sight seem far removed from Crimp's use of the term, in fact, the two manifestations are connected by the rather unexpected importance given by each to the work of Sherrie Levine. Levine's work can thus be seen to present a problem-case for the 'picture'. To Crimp and other theorists of the earlier moment such as Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Levine's photographic appropriations of original works by older, male, modernist photographers such as Edward Weston seemed exemplary of a postmodern attack on such foundation-stones of modernist aesthetics as originality, authenticity and individual creativity.[2] Yet in an essay published in 2003, Jeff Wall performed his own act of appropriation, lifting Levine's work over to his side of the boundary that Solomon-Godeau had drawn, between 'art photography' and art that, (like Levine's) only uses photography.[3] Wall wrote that he viewed Levine's work as saying, 'study the masters' – in other words, as implying not a critique of authorship, as Crimp and Solomon-Godeau had it, but instead, obedience to authority, and a reinscription of it.[4]

Whilst Wall's is a surprising and counter-intuitive reading of Levine's photographs, nevertheless, it strikes me as useful for suggesting we attend to the specific force at work within her imitation of the 'masters'. Viewed with Wall's comments in mind, her work might recall Gilles Deleuze's account of 'force', as illustrated in his account of the scream, which deforms the body even as it enacts obedience in response to compulsion.[5] In this light, the twist of the boy's body in Levine's photographs *After Edward Weston* (1980) might become newly salient (plate 1). Even the 'wince' on the face of the woman (Carrie Mae Burroughs) in Levine's *After Walker Evans* (1981) could be seen as taking on this sense of bodily twist which, in Deleuze's account, marks the deforming impact of obedience, or 'force'.



2 Gerhard Richter, *Tisch (Table)*, 1962. Oil on canvas, 90.17 × 113.03 cm. Private Collection. Photo: © Gerhard Richter/Ben Blackwell. Courtesy of the artist and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

This reading would help refine our sense of what criticality Levine's turn to the picture might be understood to possess, so that we understand it not on an avant-gardist model of oppositional critique, but instead as a more bodily resistance. This would help us then to understand how Levine could be important to both Wall's account, on the one hand, and Crimp's and Solomon-Godeau's, on the other. 'Resistance' here would look identical with obedience – both being manifest in a single convulsion making visible that 'force' which speaks through or takes shape in the body's borrowed material. However, whilst Deleuze found a source of optimism in this account, I shall remain ambivalent about the prospects of such a model of bodily 'resistance' as any kind of replacement for older avant-garde models of a progressive politics. Instead, I shall limit myself here to noting merely the diagnostic usefulness of Deleuze's account of 'force' as productive of a particular kind of imagistic deformation. I want to suggest it is something of this sort that is at the root of the return of the 'picture' in photography after conceptual art. To step ahead of myself a little, I shall suggest that what we are given in the work of these 'new pictorialists' is a sense of the picture as a force of deformation of the figure and of space.

The usefulness of Wall's essay for the present, then, lies in pointing out that Sherrie Levine should be considered at least as important a parent to the new pictorialism as Wall himself is usually thought to be. The next task is to become more precise about what this genealogy means for specific artists, and then to begin to differentiate amongst the several notably different artists often grouped together as post-Bechers photographers. For the purposes of this chapter, I propose to focus on Thomas Demand, whose work may be seen to link most strongly to that of Sherrie Levine, since the work of both involves appropriation. What are we to make of the double root I have proposed – Wall and Levine, the modernist and the postmodernist – as the basis of his practice and production?



3 Gerhard Richter, *Betty*, 1988. Oil on canvas, 102.2 × 72.4 cm. Saint Louis: Saint Louis Art Museum (funds given by Mr and Mrs R. Crosby Kemper Jr through the Crosby Kemper Foundations, The Arthur and Helen Baer Charitable Foundation, Mr and Mrs Van-Lear Black III, Anabeth Calkins and John Weil, Mr and Mrs Gary Wolff, the Honourable and Mrs Thomas F. Eagleton; Museum Purchase, Dr and Mrs Harold J. Joseph, and Mrs Edward Mallinckrodt, by exchange). Photo: © Gerhard Richter. Courtesy of the artist and Saint Louis Art Museum.

THE BODY OF PAINTING

Jeff Wall's 'first picture', *Destroyed Room* of 1978, is entered as number 1 in his catalogue raisonné and described by the artist as the work from which he dates his mature production, although it is not the first he made.[6] In this respect, *Destroyed Room* is comparable to Gerhard Richter's *Table* of 1962 (plate 2), which is likewise considered by Richter's commentators to be his 'first picture' in a psychological rather than a strictly historical sense, because it articulates for the first time the knot at the core of his artistic production.[7] *Table* itself does a good job of picturing this: the gestural scrawl in the middle of the canvas, over the photo-realistic painting of a table, pits the marks of 'abstract' painting against the marks of representational painting, both of them, however, invalidated and cancelling each other out. This is the central 'knot' that would become the 'braid' or twist in even such a perfectly accomplished painting as *Betty* of 1988 (plate 3), in which photography and painting are centrally wound together, equally perfectly obliterating or 'wiping' the central focus of the figure that would be the girl's face. The conundrum of painting's destruction by photography is figured here in that what ruins the portrait is the seeming photographic happenstance, artfully confected in paint, that the girl has just turned her face away. Looking at *Table* and *Betty* together, the later painting seems like a repeat performance of Richter's 'first', in the way in which the scrawl of the knot gets played out and displaced both in Betty's serpentine pose and in the twist of her chignon. The result of photography's intervention, pictured here in paint, is a kind of deformation of the figure, a central twist or braid.

I see *Destroyed Room* as performing the same sort of job in relation to Wall's oeuvre that *Table* does for Richter's. In Wall's case, the job his picture does is to

make plain that his project will be to lay bare the structure of pictorial composition. In *Destroyed Room* the knife-slashed mattress becomes the figure for something like the body of painting, embodying the picture that Wall will excavate and expose. As is well known, and as Wall has himself suggested, the central lozenge references the bed in Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapolous* (1827–28), the raft in Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1819), and the female mannequin in Duchamp's *Etant donnés* (1944–66).

It is this last work in particular which enables the reading of the mattress as a stand-in for the body of the picture that Wall rends and turns out – a carcass he exposes. Indeed, it is interesting how much and how often Wall figures the picture on this model, as a body to which some violence has been done, producing remains on which his own work feeds. This is, surely, the insider's joke (and we might pause to wonder if there is any other kind of joke in Wall than an 'insider's' joke) in *Vampire's Picnic* (1991); it is as though Wall were, throughout his practice, playing vampire at the feast of past paintings. After all, pictorial composition is so often figured as 'disjecta membra' in his work. The phrase seems apt for describing the peculiar appearance of disjointed fragments of pictorial composition in *The Storyteller* (1986), for example, which includes on the far lower left the group of figures from Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863). Elsewhere in the picture we see undigested 'gobbets' of Seurat's *Une Baiganade, Asnières* (1883–84) in the poses of the two figures left of centre. These are so unintegrated into the picture they look like waste, stray morsels of flesh strewn alongside the motorway overpass which stands in for Seurat's river, seeming like a giant intestinal tube.

Support for conceiving of the picture-space as bodily in these terms comes from Roland Barthes, who points out that a bodily conception of pictorial composition is embedded within classical French picture-theory. Barthes quotes the following entire passage from Diderot's essay 'Composition':

> A well-composed picture [tableau] is a whole contained under a single point of view, in which the parts work together to one end and form by their mutual correspondence a unity as real as that of the members of the body of an animal; so that a piece of painting made up of a large number of figures thrown at random onto the canvas, with neither proportion, intelligence nor unity no more deserves to be called a *true composition* than scattered studies of legs, nose and eyes on the same cartoon deserve to be called a *portrait* or even *a human figure*.[8]

As Barthes points out in his own voice, the successful figural composition then bears a load which can only be described as fetishistic: 'Thus is the body expressly introduced into the idea of the tableau, but it is the whole body. … [T]he organs, grouped together and as though held in cohesion by the magnetic power of the segmentation, function in the name of a transcendence, that of the figure, which receives the full fetishistic load and becomes the sublime substitute of meaning: it is this meaning that is fetishized.'[9] This bodily conception of composition is an idea which is echoed by Wall, who argues that the 'painted body' is 'the central term of the classical concept of the picture'.[10]

What especially interests me is Barthes' parenthetical remark in this essay. 'Doubtless', Barthes writes,

> there would be no difficulty in finding in post-Brechtian theatre and post-Eisensteinian cinema *mises-en-scène* marked by the dispersion of the tableau, the pulling to pieces of the 'composition', the setting in movement of the 'partial' organs of the human figure, in short the holding in check of the metaphysical meaning of the work – but then also of its political meaning; or, at least, the carrying over of this meaning towards *another* politics.[11]

It is precisely this kind of disarrangement of parts that we witness, I think, in Wall's (and, I shall argue, in Demand's) pictures. An illustration of this is to be found in *Diagonal Composition* (1993) where, as Briony Fer has pointed out, the remains of constructivist composition are figured like so much spattered detritus.[12] The diagonal lines of the composition and the bright, clear colours are presented as the remains of constructivism on the model of a set of bones, or the triangular carcass of a half-eaten Sunday roast; the dirty piece of soap the stand-in for this 'matter out of place' in the body of the photograph. We are given here a sense of photography as a collection of borrowed parts of past painting and sculpture.

Steve Edwards has pointed to a similar disarrangement of parts, which in this case is rendered explicitly as bodily, in Wall's *A Donkey in Blackpool* (1999, plate 4), in which, he suggests, the two mangers shown at right and left of the central donkey make us think of the animal's rib-cages:

> The mood of Wall's photograph turns darker . . . at the point that the beholder recognizes those two mangers as the external reflection of the donkey's interior – as two sets of splayed ribs, as if the animal's carcass had been cracked open along its backbone. . . . The central, dry hollow of the picture space is now the cavity of the donkey's chest and the beholder's gaze is directed into the interior of the animal's body.[13]

I want to build on this analysis, which I find convincing, to move from the particular case to a wider argument about the disorder of pictorial structure in Wall's work. The in-and-out wriggle or zigzag of reading which Edwards alerts us to, in and out of the donkey's carcass, is cued for us, I want to suggest, by the flattened, weird corner of the room Wall has been careful to include.

This corner-construction is a key form or pictorial structure found in many of Wall's works. Of course his oeuvre is carefully constructed so that there isn't one thing that can be said to be true in all his works. (Indeed, this is a feature of its particular condition, this carefully managed construction of variation.) Nevertheless, a left- or rightward slanting, diagonal corner, which is flattened out again across the remaining lateral extent of the picture is a feature of many of Wall's works. For example, in *Stereo* of 1980 (and by the way, I think the close similarity in composition between *A Donkey* . . . and *Stereo* suggests rather an obvious joke, along the lines of 'hung like a . . .'); and in *No* (1983), *Man in Street* (1995), and *A Double Self-Portrait* (1979).

The function of this feature, or how it reads, is as a weird wrinkle or wave in space which somehow flattens or compresses volume. It is a way of building space into the picture, but at the same time somehow ironing it out: an in-and-out



4 Jeff Wall, *A Donkey in Blackpool*, 1999. Transparency in light-box, 195 × 244 cm. Basel: Kunstmuseum Basel. Photo: © Jeff Wall. Courtesy of the artist.

structure, that, as it returns to the lateral plane, functions as if sewing the picture space to the surface. It is characteristic of Wall's sense of 'composition' – of the slight over-emphasis he places on it – that this lozenge of space should be 'off-balance', as though 'thrown off' in a kind of lunge sideways, this extra portion of space then gathered in, looped or lassoed to the rest, like an off-cut; or perhaps an extra pictorial limb. It is an extra portion we might want to call, following Christian Metz, a 'part-space', on the model of the psychoanalytic concept of the 'part-object'.[14] The expanded picture space that is composed by the inclusion of such fragments is something that seems to be crucial to Wall's sense of what a picture is. And the uncanniness or sense of excess about this, its slightly unpredictable springload of psychic affect, is something Wall seems to think of as a strong aesthetic quality.[15]

Many people have called Wall's work uncanny and this description seems justified: the work is rife with doubles; split with multiple, bent picture spaces; fixed by frozen geometry; artificially lit but curiously unilluminated; saturated with all-over colour yet curiously, I think, colourless; full of dead pictorial remnants which are uncannily reanimated. And yet, the uncanny does not explicitly feature either in the account Wall gives of his own work, or the account of it given by Michael Fried, who uses Wall as foundational to his new account of contemporary pictorialist photography.[16] Instead, the terms used in the lexicon for the new art-photography, which Fried uses, and which

Wall, to an extent, shares with him in his own critical writing, are tradition, composition, unity, intention and medium. (Nevertheless, as I have indicated above, I think there is a little space to be opened up between Fried's art theory and Wall's, which I take to be more open to, for example, the positive aesthetic possibilities of the uncanny.)

Fried has extended these terms to the interpretation of the work of Thomas Demand. In an essay published in *Artforum* in 2005, Fried argued that Demand's work rescues photography from chance – the obliteration of authorial inscription which it always threatens – by restoring to it 'intendedness'. Every single thing in the photograph is clearly artificial, made out of coloured paper by the artist, and therefore clearly all a sign of the artist's will. Building on this, Fried argues, Demand's photographs 'thematize or indeed allegorize intendedness as such' in a way that is, for Fried, the hallmark of a serious art medium.[17] I shall say outright that this seems to me a bad reading of Demand; none of the work's distinctive qualities or effects seems described or captured by this account. Furthermore, I would want to detach myself from what appear to me to be the critical stakes of this argument: the apparently blatant wish to reinscribe the artist as explicit foundation stone for a new modernist aesthetics, reinstating the notion of a medium behind which stands the figure of the artist – 'intendedness' seems so transparent a restoration of what Barthes called the Author-God. Beneath this restoration, the ultimate aim would appear to be to find a way to attribute to photography the kind of 'autonomy' once thought within modernism to attach to the mediums of painting and sculpture; an aim which seems to me open to question. Nevertheless, it is a characteristic (and I think excellent) feature of Fried's method to challenge those who might disagree with his analysis to offer a better account of the pictures, interpretation being decided one way or the other in the end by this test. My excavation up to this point of key features of Wall's pictures prepares the way for the account I propose to offer in this chapter to meet this challenge, offering in what follows an alternative description of Demand's work.

THE BODY WITHOUT ORGANS

The term I want to reclaim for Demand is *visceral*. For me, Demand's work recalls that uncanny 'squirming' life of dead things which Max Kozloff described in his essay on soft sculpture.[18] This reaction is admittedly a personal one, and perhaps it is not widely shared. After all, 'visceral' is not a word much used in connection with Demand's work in the current literature. Nevertheless, I believe that it captures certain aspects of the works' distinctive aesthetic qualities which are widely felt, even if they have not, to date, been voiced. There are two key qualities which I mean my use of the word 'visceral' to capture. The first of these is 'interiority'. *These pictures are all about the interior*, I want to say. Indeed, that *there is no exterior* is crucial, I would argue, to their peculiar affect. Hence the particular thrill of those images which seem for a moment to suggest the outside world – as, for example, in *Pit* (1999), where the gleaming, slick surface of the yellow raincoat gives the viewer a hint of rain, as though its wearer had just come in from outside; and yet *that we know there can be no outside* surely is what accounts for the peculiar charge of the picture. Similarly, in *Tavern no. 2* (2006), the dramatic tension of the work depends upon the slightly open window on the right, which seems to offer

the viewer a 'way in'. This inwards-leading dynamic is intensified as *Tavern* is one of the few images Demand has made in series, and as the series progresses, we seem to travel further and further *into* the house, exploring room by room, and ending in the cupboard which is perhaps where the little boy in the related news-story died.[19]

'Interiority' is signalled in a number of important ways in Demand's work, and in the various permutations of this theme, a certain slippage occurs, from one to another sense of what kind of 'interior' is at stake. For example, a sense of interior space colonizing exterior space plays out importantly in Demand's design for exhibition installations, particularly his installation at the Serpentine Gallery in London in 2006, for which he had wallpaper printed to the design of the ivy in *Tavern no. 2*.[20] In the rather extraordinary photographs of this installation published in the exhibition catalogue, the curved roof of the gallery produces the illusion that the space in the gallery is being tipped up and pushed out, evacuated from the picture, very much as though the gallery walls and floor formed one all-over surface; as glossy and lacking in any volumetric depth as one of Demand's own photographs.

Interiority is also cued by the fact that Demand's works are made from media images – images which, we are aware, we may have previously 'consumed'. This helps explain the curious sense we have when we look at them – a sense which cannot be pinpointed precisely as a specific memory – that these pictures seem to have come somehow from 'inside' us. This sense is intensified by the powerful editing to which, we sense, the images have been subjected: we do not need to compare each one against its source image to know that certain things have been silently and purposefully removed (for example, there is no text on any of the labels or papers). Demand's cutting, cropping, and editing of his source photographs – and above all his decisive depopulation of them – in its unsettling, unreasonable, and determined efficiency, seems to imitate the operations of our own interior mechanisms: the selective obliterations of forgetting, perhaps, or the distortions of the dreamwork, or, simply, the systematic yet irrational, deeply unconscious, somatic processes of digestion.

Furthermore, the works signal (in a different sense) 'interiority' in being keyed to one another. Every work in Demand's oeuvre is constructed as though a part of one giant body; each part relationally bearing on the other. *Sink* (1997), for example, Demand says he made because he noticed that all his works up to that point were rectilinear. He calls *Sink* 'a precious counterpart to my other works', and similarly, *Panel* (1996), which he says 'balances and redistributes the tension between the other works'.[21] The whole corpus thus behaves as one, mutually inflecting, organism.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that all these senses of 'interiority' are the same. What I am saying is that it is notable that Demand's work across its whole extent pursues these different senses of 'interiority', and that the cumulative effect of these pursuits of 'internal' over 'external' space and reference is to make Demand's, overall, a peculiarly 'inwards-looking' body of work.

In this respect I am to a certain extent simply following Fried and other commentators on Demand. After all, the clearest sense in which there is no 'outside' in Demand's work is that it abandons the reference to the external world which supplied a sustaining support and rationale for most twentieth-century

practices of photography, finding its reference points instead in the relatively more 'internal' world of compositional reference to other pictures. Images which appear to reference real things photographed in the external world – real kitchens, real bathrooms and so on – are in fact photographs of studio-built, interior sets, and their reference point is really to other photographs. Thus an embeddedness in the external world, which was one of the things taken as most fundamental to photography in its twentieth-century histories, is precisely what Demand's work appears to have abandoned.

It was Wall of course who licensed this abandonment, by founding the tradition of staged, or 'tableau' photography, whose legibility depends on – and whose support is provided by – an internally erected armature of compositional references to other pictures. But where Fried sees 'intendedness' in this, and an achievement at last of a kind of autonomy for photography, to put it on a par with other modernist mediums, I see something other: that there is no 'outside' to Demand's system does not render it, I think, precisely the space of a rational mind. Rather, I suggest, Demand's mutually inflecting system of relations between large-scale photography and studio-built paper sculpture describes a space of the irrational body. It is for this reason I have called Demand's work 'visceral', aiming by this term to encompass all these different, but mutually inter-relating, senses of interiority and to bring them under the claim that ultimately the register of their cumulative functions is bodily.

Demand's works are notably free of bodies. Therefore it may seem odd that I take the bodily to be such a key term for interpretation of his work. My first and most important justification for this step is that it is based on my – and I think a shared, if unarticulated – aesthetic response to the works. My claim is that the different kinds of pursuit of interiority in Demand's pictures and their modes of display provoke strong bodily reactions from the viewer: of claustrophobia, of airlessness, and of an inward shudder or quiver, like nausea, as though the pictures led inwards into our own bodies. This is avowedly a personal response, and yet I place strong strategic and rhetorical emphasis upon it. I do this firstly, and following Fried in this respect, because I place considerable importance on founding the task of interpretation on such response, and second because other interpretations of Demand's work so far make no place for a similarly strong characterization of their aesthetic effects – surely a central task for criticism which in this case has been neglected. Nevertheless, there are other justifications. One justification is that, to recap, I think that a certain model of composition, or rather the disarrangement of a certain model of composition, is fundamental to the work of the new 'pictorialist' photographers of whom Wall and Demand are two. A good account of this classical model of pictorial composition is provided by Barthes to the effect that the classical 'tableau' is founded on a model of balanced arrangement of parts whose fundamental model is the human body. Where this is disarranged – as is the case, I tried to show, in Wall – the picture can be persuasively read as resembling a scattered collection of body parts which fail to cohere, and which possess a certain uncanny quality of affect.

Finally, a third reason for taking the kind of 'interiority' which is at stake in Demand's practice overall to be a bodily interiority is because what we are looking at is a practice in which a sculptural body is swallowed up inside an image and

Publisher's Note:
Image not available
in the electronic edition

5 Claes Oldenburg, *Bedroom Ensemble*, 1963 (1 of 3). Wood, vinyl, metal, artificial fur, cloth and paper. Installation space 3 × 6.5 × 5.25 m. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada. Photo: © Claes Oldenburg. Courtesy of the artist and the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

within a photographic practice which supersedes it. Specifically, we should remember, Demand's is a practice in which the sculptural object is created by being externalized from the inside of a photograph, and then is re-digested, or made to disappear again, repeatedly, systematically, 'inside' the image. In this way, a certain deep irrationalism of sculpture, of the sort described by Kozloff in his essay on soft sculpture of the 1960s, is at work at a subterranean level in Demand's photographic practice. Yet it is equally important that this sculptural logic should disappear again, swallowed up in a convulsion of the newly elastic and encompassing body of photography.

We should remember, I think, that in Sherrie Levine's photographs *After Edward Weston*, a buried sculptural figure was also at stake, since the twisted poses adopted by Weston's son, Neil, were modelled after the poses of Classical statuary. Here a double obliteration of sculpture was at work, burying the memory of the marble figure in the living flesh of the body before its second immurement in the glassy surface of the photograph. Yet, in addition, the fact that in his essay Kozloff was describing the work of Claes Oldenburg, amongst others, should suggest to us that in the prehistory of Demand's work stands Oldenburg's *Bedroom Ensemble* of 1963 (plate 5). *Bedroom Ensemble* is a frozen



6 Thomas Demand, *Grotto/Grotte*, 2006. C-print/Diasec, 198 × 440 cm. Photo: © Thomas Demand, VG Bild Kunst, Bonn/DACS, London. Courtesy of the artist.

composition which displays sculpture as already pictorially infected before it is photographed.[22] This bent, weird, photogenic sculptural group was produced by being worked through the mechanism of the picture (in this case, a perspective diagram rather than a photograph) and back out again, to produce the sculptural object as remnant or left-over. As a result, we see a deep, perverse, coding of sculpture at the level of, or within, the photographic surface. The characteristic, if profoundly strange, product of this in Oldenburg's case is the distinctive form of sculptural ensemble (or three-dimensional 'picture') called the 'tableau'.

The installation of Demand's *Clearing* (2003) suggests comparison with Oldenburg's *Bedroom Ensemble* as a 'tableau' built to a fixed, pictorial viewpoint. Perhaps an even more compelling comparison is with Demand's *Grotto* (2006), with its built-in digital pixel incorporated in the cardboard model (plates 6 and 7). Although Demand's desire to bring the condition of the photographic deeply into the materiality of sculpture is most visible here, where the digital pixel is reproduced in layers of paper, this kind of photogenic distortion is a part of all his sculptural constructions, which are built not in 'correct' proportion but so that they appear in correct perspective in the photograph.[23] In *Grotto* the results of this condition are made manifest as something like a corruption of the sculptural object by the picture, the object almost rotting from within as it takes on aspects of this digested form.

What, then, is the name for the territory of the visceral, for the giant body which I see Demand's corpus as forming? Barthes' description has already pointed us to what I think is the answer; and here again some of the terminology introduced by Deleuze in his account of the (similarly photographically infected) practice of Francis Bacon is helpful. The irrationalism of Demand's sculptural practice – its inability to support itself and its parasitic dependence on, or engulfment within, the second medium of photography – suggests the disarranged anatomy of the 'body without organs' that Deleuze describes.[24] The body without organs, Deleuze says, is a body not without organs so much as a body without *organization*, which cannot,



7 Detail of Thomas Demand, *Grotto/Grotte*, 2006. C-print/Diasec, 198 × 440 cm. Photo: © Thomas Demand, VG Bild Kunst, Bonn/DACS, London. Courtesy of the artist.

therefore, be self-supporting.[25] Similarly, photography in Demand's production is not self-supporting, but must 'prop' itself on some support in a parasitic system. In Demand's work, photography and sculpture are 'propped' on one another, forced to cohere by the invisible operations of the picture, to which both mediums, in a stunted, deforming way, must conform.

Demand's photography works on the body of sculpture in a way I believe is similar to the way Wall works on the body of painting. In each case, the remaindered medium is rendered bodily, as something dead but reanimated, working in an airless vacuum. Yet in neither Demand's nor Wall's case does this operation produce 'photography' as a medium in its own right. For in each case, photography appears only to ventriloquize the deforming force of a prior 'picture'. And thus I think it is right to call the picture a *force*, in the Deleuzian sense, rather than a medium, recalling Deleuze's description of the scream in Bacon's paintings of Pope Innocent X.[26] For the 'picture' is not something that has its own material integrity or set of working procedures. Rather, it is something which speaks through photography and is made visible only in the distinctive, convulsive, twist which is its operation of deformation on the receiving body of the mediums of painting or sculpture.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND 'PICTURES'

From a more art-historical viewpoint, this sense of the 'picture' as an abstract, un-mediumized structure – which enables a migration between mediums, from painting to staged photograph or from press photograph to paper sculpture and back to photography – is precisely what Douglas Crimp originally identified in his catalogue essay of 1977 and in the modified version published in *October* in 1979. Crimp described in that essay the particular force of the picture as being to de-mediumize, or to enable transfer across mediums.[27] It is for this reason that Crimp further identified in the 'picture' a particularly uncanny quality: the property of achieving a ghastly and yet all the more forceful 'presence' without being fully 'present', which he likened to the effect of the ghostly doppelgänger described in the short story 'The Jolly Corner' by Henry James. Returning to the problematic of 'Pictures' in his later essay, 'The photographic activity of postmodernism', Crimp argued specifically that it is the stripping of the 'aura' of the work of art which results in the curious, uncanny, intensities of effect attaching to the works of the artists he groups under the heading 'Pictures'. These are the result, he says, of a kind of return of aura to the artwork, but this return is not a recuperation. Rather, in the work of artists such as Levine, aura is displaced, and shown to be 'only an aspect of the copy, not the original'.[28]

This description of works possessing simultaneously a deafening emptiness, or lack of 'art'-value, and at the same time, a heightened and uncanny aesthetic effect is very close to that articulated by Walter Benjamin in his essay 'The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility', when he describes the peculiar effects of the photographs of Eugène Atget. Famously, Benjamin described Atget as photographing deserted Paris streets 'like scenes of crime'.[29] He also said Atget's photographs 'suck the aura out of reality like water from a sinking ship'.[30] Both these descriptions may remind us of the work of Demand.[31] Demand presents empty scenes which, even more than Atget's, are guaranteed to be empty of people (because we know they are cardbard stage sets), and which in several cases actually are scenes of crime (as for example in *Bathroom*, of 1997 and *Corridor* of 1995). Like Atget's photographs, Demand's seem to have had something pumped out of them, leaving them airless and confined. Thus, in the work of both there is a simultaneous sense of the emptiness of non-art and of curiously intensified and uncomfortable effect, summed up in the way that, in Benjamin's descriptions, Atget's work appears emphatically de-auratic and uncanny.

Benjamin's descriptions, it may be thought, open a door to let the notion of 'aura' back in. Ostensibly Benjamin situates Atget as pinpointing the moment when cult or auratic value has fled the photograph and the human countenance has vacated the scene. Atget's emphatically deserted photographs apparently dramatize the moment when new and de-auratic values come to the fore in photography. Yet the highly suggestive terms in which Benjamin praises Atget (compared, for example, to his praise of the similarly de-auratic August Sander) may arguably be thought to mark the moment of a resuscitation of aura: or something like it. After all, aura and the uncanny bear a buried relationship to each other throughout Benjamin's essays on photography – in the way he suggests that people captured in old photographs have the capacity to 'touch' us in the present, and in his suggestion that early portrait photographs preserve



8 Jeff Wall, *The Crooked Path*, 1991. Transparency in light-box, 119 × 149 cm. Friedrich Christian Flick Collection. Photo: © Jeff Wall. Courtesy of the artist.

a buried layer of past time, or some quintessence of the sitter, in the light seared into the plate.[32] However, as Crimp has shown, this is the characteristically 'double' effect achieved where aura has been *dis*-placed, rather than retrieved. In the work of Thomas Demand, we seem to see a re-staging of this vision of Atget: the auratic returns and is re-written or writ large as a dramaturgy of the uncanny. Demand's engagement of the uncanny in his photography is made explicit in a work such as *Ghost*; the only work of his to suggest a 'presence' in the scene. Altogether, Demand's photographs might seem to confirm Crimp's diagnosis, that 'in our time the aura has become only a presence, which is to say, a ghost'.[33]

Furthermore, we should remember that this phenomenon – the stripping of the 'aura' of the work of art and the curious, uncanny intensities of effect which are resultant properties of the commodified art-object – is not a property or power belonging to photography in itself. Rather, as Benjamin himself described, it is the mark or sign of an increase in the potential for commodification of the artwork enabled by newer technologies of mechanical reproduction; a phenomenon brought about by photography, but then transferred to works in other media. In different language, we might say it is the visible sign of the operations of the *picture*, as Douglas Crimp first identified it. The 'force' at work in Demand's or Wall's production is not identical simply with 'photography', then, for it is a structure of quotation or parasitic dependence between images in different media that is only, if repeatedly, ventriloquized through photography. Recogni-



9 Eugène Atget, *Chemin à Abbeville*, before 1900. Albumen silver print, 24 × 18 cm. New York: The Museum of Modern Art. Abbott-Levy Collection. Partial gift of Shirley C. Burden. Photo: © 2009. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/SCALA, Florence.

tion of this runs counter to the suggestion that Wall's or Demand's work represents the moment of photography's realization as an art medium, as the recent writings of Fried and Wall have argued.[34]

Again, the similarity between Demand and Atget is helpful here. Despite the differences in their historical situations, the problematic of commodification is visible in each. Central to the economics of Atget's practice, after all, was the effort to take up into photography forms of the picture which had been established in other mediums – the *tableau de Paris*, for example, the 'topographical view', the *pittoresque*, and the *étude*.[35] This is something demonstrated in the comparison which was published in the Museum of Modern Art's 1981 catalogue of Atget's works, showing on the far left, a lithograph after a drawing by A. Duthoit, from before 1853, in the centre, a photograph by Charles Marville from about 1851, and on the right a photograph by Atget from before 1900.[36] Viewing these and similar correspondences, we may say that Atget's work in fact constitutes an early example of the photographic appropriation of earlier forms of picture, which had flourished in painting and prints before the invention of photography. This indeed is the source of their blankness, their emptiness – the fact that, as has often been noted, Atget's works are often indistinguishable from countless similar photographs taken by other photographers around the same time. This is the reason for their 'anti-art' value, as commentators on Atget have often insisted.[37]

However, the point is not simply that we can discern in Atget's work compositional appropriation. The forms of picture Atget retrieves are rather different pictorial structures to the specific compositions of particular Salon *grandes machines* or individual masterpieces such as *The Raft of the Medusa*; and the form of reference is rather different to that of quotation in homage to the Old Masters. In Atget, what we seem to see instead are older forms, part-objects, and remnants of pictorial structure. The *coin*, for example, or corner – a term Atget often used to categorize a courtyard scene – is a more stubborn repeated structure which is resistant to interpretation.[38] What we see at work here is the mute logic of the 'picture', which, I have suggested, we can also see at work in the photography of Wall and Demand. Although critics have mainly focused on Wall's deliberate quotation of compositional fragments from grand Salon paintings, we can see the kinds of odd leftovers and remnants of less elevated pictorial structures characteristic of Atget's photographs also in Wall's work; for example in the comparison between Wall's *The Crooked Path* of 1991 (plate 8) and a pre-1900 photograph by Atget called *Chemin à Abbeville* (plate 9). We also see similar stubborn, ineradicable, part-objects of pictures surviving in Demand's work; as in his *Tavern 2* (plate 10) and one of Atget's *Vines*, again, from before 1900 (plate 11).

This survival of what is not quite pictorial form, but is instead, pictorial part-structures, points, I want to suggest, to the functioning of something which, again, is not exactly in the register of deliberate quotation or intentionality, but is instead something more corporeal than this – something more like an obdurate



10 Thomas Demand, *Tavern/Klause II*, 2006. C-print/Diasec photograph, 178 × 244 cm. Photo: © Thomas Demand, VG Bild Kunst, Bonn/DACS, London. Courtesy of the artist.

persistence. At the same time, this gives us an understanding of the 'picture' less as compositional grand scheme, or continuing tradition, but instead as a more visceral, persistent and form-seeking structure of the image. The ground the 'picture' occupies is a *bassesse* of visual form where grand Salon paintings and banal visual documents, 'charged' news photos of scenes of crime and ordinary snapshots, are all swarmed over by the market appetite for visual consumption and repetition, producing a form of stubborn visual ubiquity that is the hallmark of the 'picture'. We can see as much, I want to suggest, in the fact that the persistent form of the *coin* in Atget's photographs is the same as that corner-structure I have described in Wall's photographic compositions, which itself echoes the shape of the mattress in his *Destroyed Room*, the shape of the raft in Géricault's *Medusa*, or the disposition of the figure in *Etant donnés*. This base level of pictorial form operates to undo the kinds of oppositions it is conventional to draw in photographic histories, between 'documentary' and 'cinematographic' in the work of Wall, for example, just as much as it undoes notions of quotation or tradition or continuity at the level of conscious intentionality.[39] It speaks against Michael Fried's account of 'intendedness' as the root-structure of Demand's photography, even as it points to the symptomatic reason for Fried's valorization of this quality in an oeuvre which is deformed, I have suggested, by the operations of the market as these play out through the processes of commodification and repetition between media. Finally, the parasitic operations of the 'picture' speak against the modernist idea of a 'medium' and point instead towards the system of production-via-prostheses which Deleuze has called the bachelor machine.[40]



11 Eugène Atget, *Vigne*, before 1900. Albumen silver print (gold-toned), printed 1980, 24 × 18 cm. Modern print by Chicago Albumen Works from the original negative in the Abbott-Levy Collection. New York: The Museum of Modern Art. Photo: © 2009. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/SCALA, Florence.

SURFACE AS PROSTHESIS

The bachelor machine as the system of production which attaches to the body without organs is an idea suggested by Rosalind Krauss to describe Sherrie Levine's sculptural production, her 1989 series, *The Bachelors (After Marcel Duchamp)*, in particular.[41] Levine caused some dismay amongst her former champions when she moved away from the method of photographic appropriation and returned to the sculptural and painting practices she had earlier appeared to reject. Levine's turn to the laborious re-making of paintings and sculptures by modernist masters seemed to mark a regressive return to 'craft', seemingly of a piece with her increasingly unsettling insistence in interviews that she had never intended not to make 'art'.[42] Yet Krauss's application of the idea of the bachelor machine to Levine's *Bachelors* suggests a way we might understand these works as continuous with her previous photographic practice. The *Bachelors* series comprises six sculptural objects made out of frosted glass, each individually displayed in its own glass vitrine. The design of each object is taken from one of the Malic Molds – the forms of the 'Bachelors' – which appear in the lower half of Marcel Duchamp's large picture on glass, *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even* (1915–23), (see plate 5 in Christine Conley's chapter in this book) also called the *Large Glass*. The relevance of photography to the *Large Glass* has long been observed by commentators, who have argued that Duchamp conceived the work in part as a materialized version of the workings of photography, or as another way of making a picture which, like a photograph, is developed on glass.[43] Levine's series comprises sculptures extracted and materialized from a glass 'photograph', but re-embedded within their original source by sharing the same extended material surface – a form of production similar to Demand's as I have described it.

Displayed as they are in individual glass vitrines, we see an additional dimension to the sense in which Levine's sculptures and her source-image share a common surface: the glass objects cast reflective doubles onto the glass walls of the specially built cases. The effect recalls Brassaï's 'involuntary sculptures' photographed on backlit glass; where, as Briony Fer has pointed out, the sculptural object appears almost as a stain or cast shadow against the light.[44] In both Levine's and Brassaï's works, what we see is the collapse of sculpture into the surface of the photograph. This example helps bring out a final, important dimension of Demand's practice: its loss and consequent fetishization of surfaces. For if the skin is the largest organ of the body, then the body without organs is a body without skin, its skin or 'surface' only its largest disarranged or displaced part.

This loss of and consequent confusion over surface is apparent in another of the links in the genealogical chain I am constructing for Demand's production: Hiroshi Sugimoto's 1999 black and white photographs of waxworks. Here, the painted surface of waxwork figures blends with the lush, creamy whites and velvety blacks of Sugimoto's prints, giving the resulting images a curiously painterly quality. The confusion that the spectator feels on first seeing these works – are they paintings, photographs, or something else? – is very like the confusion often felt on first confronting Demand's works. The painterliness of Sugimoto's images, a consequence of this particular blending of sculpture with photography, is, I suggest, a compensation-structure which at the same time points to the deeply intermedia condition of this work.

In his well-known essay on photography in conceptual art, Jeff Wall describes the loss of the modernist painting surface as a key loss in the history of the picture – a loss that even photographic pictorialism cannot restore. Instead, he argues, the contingency, disarrangement and freshness which the modernist painting surface signalled must be appropriated by pictorialist photography, which must take over the spontaneity and look of non-composition in the depicted scene. Hence Wall urges the importance of reportage photography as the next territory which the 'picture' may colonize.[45]

'Reportage' or press photography is the kind of photography Demand almost exclusively pursues. Thus Wall's diagnosis might be thought to pertain especially to Demand's work. And yet, I have suggested, such distinctions of category are undone in Wall's and Demand's work by the hungrier, more incessant, recycling logic of the 'picture'. Thus, the significance of the loss of a painterly or sculptural surface in their works is at another register. The consequence of trying to rebuild qualities originally attached to a 'surface' in the interior of the photograph, is that in Demand's case we are given a kind of sculpture in which the outside has migrated to the inside – for which, as a result, *there is no skin*; that is, no boundary marking the 'outside' of an object. Instead, as a secondary compensation, we are offered numerous painstaking replica surfaces. Indeed, Demand's work sometimes looks as though it is trying to become a replacement model for all the different kinds of surfaces in the world – see for example the gleaming surfaces of the gold bars in *Bullion* (2003), the shadow-dappled leaves in *Clearing*, the rough straw in *Stall* (2000) or the pristine, lurid green grass in *Lawn* (1998).

As primary compensation, however, is erected the photographic surface, yielding an all-over visibility, an utterly glazed and impermeable, miraculously whole and intact skin which functions almost as a kind of prosthesis for the lost skin of the sculptural object. This is the condition, indeed, of the works by other artists I have discussed – the collapse of the sculptural object into the photographic surface produces the photograph as prosthetic 'skin', which can present in various ways. One possibility, for example, is to be lush, creamy and explicitly compensatory, because painterly, like Sugimoto's. In Wall's work, the need for an investment in a hard, glazed, impermeable, prosthetic surface is made apparent in one of his earliest works, the *Picture for Women* (1979), where the basilisk eye of the camera appears embedded within the reflective surface of the mirror, which is presented as an explicit double of the surface of the photograph. Wall's fetishism for surfaces is also apparent in his discussion of glass architecture in his essay on Dan Graham, and more subtly, in the sheer glut of visual detail and ostentatious pictorial clarity of his works, which suggests the kind of fetishism in which nothing is hidden, but everything is irrelevant, the wealth of detail providing a prosthetic surface which proves the most effective mask.[46] Above all, of course, Wall erects as prosthesis the illuminated light-box surface. Indeed, whilst critical attention has been paid to the lit-up quality of Wall's light-boxes; no one I think has yet remarked on the doubled, impervious surface which it lends to the photograph, which I suggest we can now see as a protective skin or carapace. The shiny surfaces of Demand's photographs (which are habitually laminated to Plexiglass) obviously reference Wall's light-boxes, as, we might suggest, they also call to mind Gerhard Richter's mirror-paintings.

The surface as prosthesis is the deeper significance of the ivy wallpaper which covered the walls in the Serpentine installation of Demand's works.[47] 'Ivy on ivy',

as Beatriz Colomina has written, 'cladding on cladding' – this installation strategy provides a demonstration not only of the in-and-out movement of the work and the way it rewrites all external space as internal, but also functions as a demonstration of the nervous intensification of surface that we see in Demand and the compensatory function of 'skin' as a replacement surface erected for sculpture by the photograph.[48] This sort of prosthetic operation mirrors the mode of production that is characteristic of bachelor machines, as Krauss described it. Within bachelor-machine production, mediums are characteristically produced by taking another medium as object, resulting in a very specific intermedia condition. Mediums for mediums, then, as a set of prosthetic operations.[49]

In conclusion, I contend that neither Wall nor Demand can be used to revive modernist aesthetics. Fried, I think, in seeing Demand as rescuing photography from contingency and performing an elaborate demonstration of 'intendedness', not only understands this as at last elevating photography to the 'status' of a medium, but wants to see this performance as exemplary for our relationship to the world. It is a soothing restoration of a certain model of our relationship to things, healing the wound which so many (Roland Barthes chief among them) have understood photography as representing, and re-producing it as an art capable of modelling for us an exemplary 'autonomy'. I don't think this accounts for the particular aesthetic qualities of the work, nor the deeply embedded force of deformation encoded in the sculptural twisting to the photographic surface which it performs. Nor does it produce an art-historical genealogy such as the one I have shown can be constructed for this mode of production. Nor, finally, does it describe the way in which Demand's work shows photography and sculpture as grasping not the world but only each other, in a mode of desiring, convulsive and deforming production. In sum, the body without organs is too pervasive a presence within Demand's works to allow them any purchase on such foundation stones of modernist aesthetics as medium, aura or intentionality. We have instead to recognize in them a postmedium condition, within which the picture spreads out like ivy, over and within bodies of painting and sculpture which are remaindered as part-objects and part-spaces in the resuscitated photograph-fetish.

Notes

1 Douglas Crimp, 'Pictures', in Brian Wallis, ed., *Art after Modernism*, New York, 1984, 175–87. This is a reprint of the version in *October*, 8, Spring 1979, 75–88. For Wall's use of the term 'picture' see most notably his essay, '"Marks of indifference": aspects of photography in, or as, conceptual art', in Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer, eds, *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975*, Los Angeles, CA and Cambridge, MA, 1996, 247–67; but also his 'Frames of reference' in *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews*, New York, 2007, 173–81, and his much earlier, 'Unity and fragmentation in Manet', in *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews*, 77–83. A recent article by Diarmuid Costello, 'Pictures, again', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, 8, 1, 2008, 11–41, also considers the interest of thinking about Crimp's term 'picture' in relation to recent large-scale photography and the art-theory of Michael Fried.

2 See Crimp, 'Pictures'; Crimp, 'The photographic activity of postmodernism', in *On the Museum's Ruins*, Cambridge, MA, 1993, 108–25; Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'Photography after art photography', in Brian Wallis, ed., *Art After Modernism*, New York, 1984, 75–85, and Solomon-Godeau, 'Winning the game when the rules have been changed', in Liz Wells, ed., *The Photography Reader*, New York, 2003, 152–63.

3 Wall, 'Frames of reference'. Abigail Solomon-Godeau contrasts 'art photographers' to 'artists using photography' and groups Levine with the latter in her essay, 'Winning the game when the rules have been changed', 155.

4 Wall, 'Frames of reference', 173.

5 Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith, New York, 2004, 61–2.

6 The year before he made *Destroyed Room*, Wall made a triptych, *Faking Death*, using his new support, the photographic transparency. This work was first exhibited with *Destroyed Room* in 1978 and exhibited twice more after this before being withdrawn by the artist from his oeuvre around 1980. For details, see Theodora Vischer and Heidi Naef, eds, *Jeff Wall: Catalogue Raisonné*, Basel and Göttingen, 2005, 275.

7 *Table* is identified as Richter's 'first painting' in these terms by Robert Storr in *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, New York, 2002, 29. Richter confirms it in an interview with Storr; see 'The day is long: interview with Gerhard Richter by Robert Storr', *Art In America*, 90, 1, January 2002, 73.

8 'Diderot, 'Composition in painting', Encyclopedia vol. III (1753), as quoted by Roland Barthes in his essay, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', in *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, London, 1977, 71. For a translation of Diderot's full essay, see Beatrix L. Tollemache, *Diderot's Thoughts on Art and Style*, New York, 1893/1971, 25–34.

9 Barthes, 'Diderot', 71–2.

10 Wall, 'Unity and fragmentation in Manet', 178.

11 Barthes, 'Diderot', 71–2.

12 Briony Fer, 'The space of anxiety: sculpture and photography in the work of Jeff Wall', in Geraldine A. Johnson, ed., *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension*, New York, 1998, 234–5.

13 Steve Edwards, '"Poor Ass!" (*A Donkey in Blackpool*, 1999)', *Oxford Art Journal*, 30, 1, March 2007, 52.

14 'I would say that the off-frame effect in photography results from a singular and definitive cutting-off which figures castration and is figured by the "click" of the shutter. It marks the place of an irreversible absence, a place from which the look has been averted for ever. The photograph itself, the "in-frame", the *abducted part-space* [my italics], the place of presence and fullness . . . shares, as we see, many properties of the fetish.' Christian Metz, 'Photography and fetish', in Liz Wells, ed., *The Photography Reader*, 2002,143.

15 It may be compared, I think, with Wall's positive account of the effects of 'a fundamental instability' produced by the use of mirrors and other devices in the work of Dan Graham and Michael Asher in his essay, 'A draft for "Dan Graham's Kammerspiel"', in *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews*, 11–29. This instability, he argues, 'throws into doubt their rather severe canonical existence in [Benjamin] Buchloh's texts; it raises questions about the "progressiveness" so insistently imputed to them, but it may also make them more interesting, complex and productive than they have seemed in functionalist terms' (28).

16 See Michael Fried, 'Jeff Wall, Wittgenstein and the everyday', *Critical Inquiry*, 33, 3, Spring 2007, 495–526.

17 Michael Fried, 'Without a trace', *Artforum*, 43, March 2005, 202. Fried has recently developed this argument further in Chapter 9 of his book *Why Photography Matters As Art As Never Before*, New Haven and London, 2008.

18 Speaking of Claes Oldenburg's sculptures in particular, Kozloff writes, 'They are taken out of, or removed from, "life", and yet are found to be preternaturally welling up with it – but life of a different sort, rioting in stunned or dreaming matter. . . . As a result, the experience of Oldenburg's work is coloured . . . by a nightmare sense of conspiracy in which the spectator almost feels himself less organic than the creaturely squirming of all the dead things around him.' Max Kozloff, 'The poetics of softness', in *Renderings*, London, 1970, 227; 233.

19 For details of the news-story connected to this work see 'A conversation between Alexander Kluge and Thomas Demand', in *Thomas Demand*, London and Munich, 2006, 85–90, where Demand confirms the idea that each of the five pictures is meant to show a different moment in time (89). Mark Godfrey supplies the detail that the child was murdered in the 'broom-closet' of the tavern in his review, 'Thomas Demand: Serpentine Gallery, London', *Artforum*, 45, September 2006, 369.

20 Demand also took great care to manage the installation of his exhibition at Fondation Cartier in Paris in 2001, where he hired an architectural firm to design coloured screen/walls and used a wallpaper designed by Le Corbusier. See Demand's discussion of this installation in François Quintin, 'There is no innocent room', in Francesco Bomani et al., *Thomas Demand*, Paris and London, 2001, 61.

21 Thomas Demand, quoted in Quintin, 'There is no innocent room', 56.

22 Briony Fer discusses Oldenburg's installation in her chapter on the 'tableau' in *The Infinite Line: Re-Making Art After Modernism*, New Haven and London, 2004, 89–90.

23 Demand used at one stage to make two versions of his sculptural objects: one that was in correct perspective and one that was built to look 'correct' in the photograph. After a while, the 'correct' version fell away harmlessly within Demand's practice, as if atrophying and dropping off. See Demand, quoted in Quintin, 'There is no innocent room', 43.

24 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 44.

25 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 47.

26 Deleuze writes that in Francis Bacon's painting, Pope Innocent X screams 'as someone . . . whose only remaining function is to render th[o]se invisible forces that are making him scream . . . This is what is expressed in the phrase, "to scream at" – not to scream *before* or *about*, but to scream *at* death – which suggests this coupling

of forces, the perceptible force of the scream and the imperceptible force that makes one scream.' Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 61–2.

27 Crimp, 'Pictures', 175.

28 Crimp, 'The photographic activity of post-modernism', 117.

29 Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility' (third version, 1939), trans. Harry Zohn and Edmund Jephcott, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938–1940, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, Cambridge, MA and London, 2003, 258.

30 Walter Benjamin, 'Little history of photography' (1931), trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, in Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, eds, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 2, part 2, 1931–1934, Cambridge, MA, 1999, 518.

31 The comparison between Demand and Atget is also briefly discussed by Roxana Marcoci in her essay, 'Paper moon', in *Thomas Demand*, New York, 2005, 20.

32 Benjamin, 'Little history of photography', 514, 510.

33 Crimp, 'The photographic activity of post-modernism', 124.

34 See Wall, '"Marks of indifference"', 252, 266; and Fried, 'Without a trace', 202.

35 On the *tableau de Paris* see Maria Morris Hambourg, 'The structure of the work', in Hambourg and John Szarkowski, *The Work of Atget, vol. III: The Ancien Régime*, New York, 1983, 22. Molly Nesbit discusses the *pittoresque* and the *étude* in relation to Atget's work in her book, *Atget's Seven Albums*, New Haven and London, 1992, 71, 29–33. The 'topographical view' is discussed by Hambourg in her 'Notes on plates', in Hambourg and Szarkowski, *The Work of Atget, vol. 1: Old France*, New York, 1981, 153–4.

36 This comparison is illustrated in Hambourg and Szarkowski, *The Work of Atget, vol. 1: Old France*, 155.

37 See Rosalind Krauss 'Photography's discursive spaces', in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, MA, 1996, 131–50; and Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'Canon fodder: authoring Eugène Atget', in *Photography at the Dock*, Minneapolis, MN, 1991, 28–51.

38 On Atget's use of the *coin*, see Hambourg, 'Notes on plates', 161–2.

39 The distinction between 'documentary' and 'cinematographic' photographs amongst Wall's works was proposed by the artist and is explained in *Jeff Wall: Catalogue Raisonné*, 272. The work I discuss here, *The Crooked Path*, is classified by Wall as a 'documentary' photograph. See chapter by Wolfgang Brückle in this book.

40 See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, London, 1984, 17–22.

41 Rosalind Krauss, 'Sherrie Levine: Bachelors', in *Bachelors*, Cambridge, MA, 1999, 179–90.

42 See Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'Living with contradictions: critical practices in the age of supply-side aesthetics', in Carol Squiers, ed., *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, London, 1991, 66–7.

43 For the connection of Duchamp's *Large Glass* to photography see Rosalind Krauss, 'Where's Poppa?', in Thierry de Duve, ed., *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, Cambridge, MA, 1991, 433–62.

44 Fer, 'The space of anxiety', 239.

45 Wall, '"Marks of indifference"', 248–9.

46 See Wall, 'A draft for Dan Graham's Kammer-spiel'.

47 Godfrey's discussion is also useful here; see his 'Thomas Demand: Serpentine Gallery, London', 368–9.

48 Beatriz Colomina, 'Media as modern architecture', in *Thomas Demand*, London and Munich, 2006, 44.

49 Krauss quotes Deleuze and Guattari as quoting Marshall McLuhan: '"the content of any medium is always another medium"', in 'Sherrie Levine: Bachelors', 181.

9

ALMOST MEROVINGIAN: ON JEFF WALL'S RELATION TO NEARLY EVERYTHING

WOLFGANG BRÜCKLE

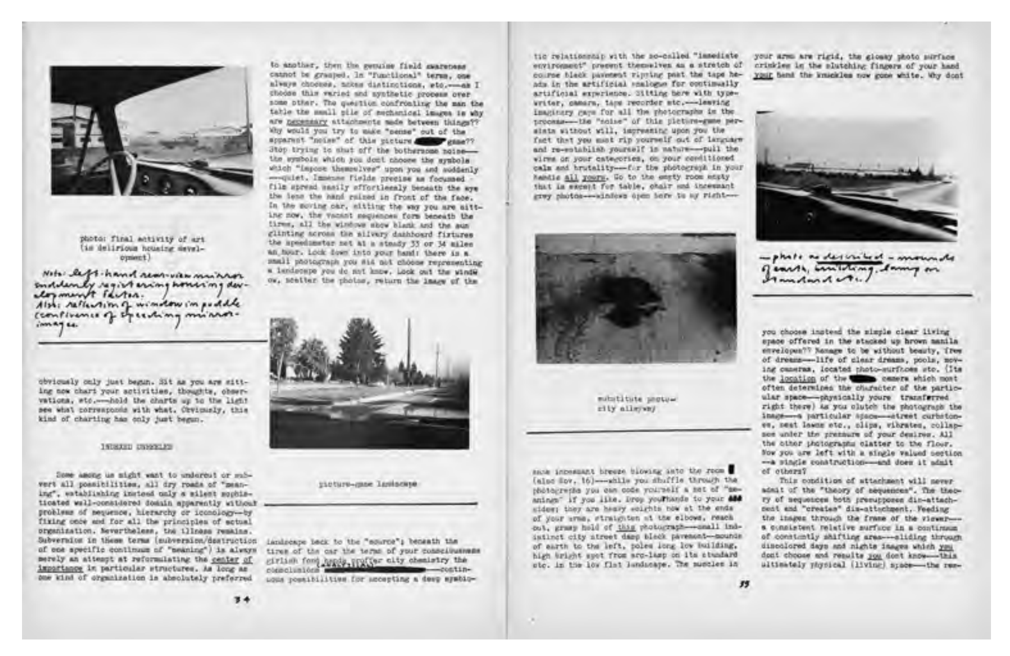
There is reason to think that the most fascinating picture among Jeff Wall's recent works is one of his apparently least complex artistic statements thus far. The reason for this fascination is precisely that it lacks the usual visual complexity of this artist's work. At any rate, this is what one might think when confronted with it on a gallery wall. And isn't *After Landscape Manual* a truly dull picture? (plate 1) It gives a view from a car, showing the dashboard and the steering wheel as well as, further away, a glimpse of the surrounding landscape, this landscape being itself quite dull. The camera's point of view implies the accidental situation of a driver sitting in his car and looking out at the suburban environment. Yet, apart from evidence of some uninspired



1 Jeff Wall, *After 'Landscape Manual'* [1969], 2003. Silver gelatin print, 25.5 × 38 cm. Italy: Collection Avon Campolin. Photo: Courtesy of Jeff Wall and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

Photography after Conceptual Art Edited by Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen

 ISBN: 978-1-444-33360-2


photo: final activity of art (in delirious housing development)

Note: left-hand rear-view mirror suddenly registering housing development factor.
Also: reflection of window in puddle (confluence of opposing mirror-images.

obviously only just begun. Sit as you are sitting now chart your activities, thoughts, observations, etc.——hold the charts up to the light see what corresponds with what. Obviously, this kind of charting has only just begun.

[illegible]

Some among us might want to undercut or subvert all possibilities, all dry roads of "meaning", establishing instead only a silent sophisticated well-considered domain apparently without problems of sequence, hierarchy or iconology—by fixing once and for all the principles of actual organization. Nevertheless, the illness remains. Subversion in these terms (subversion/destruction of one specific continuum of "meaning") is always merely an attempt at reformulating the center of importance in particular structures. As long as one kind of organization is absolutely preferred

to another, then the genuine field awareness cannot be grasped. In "functional" terms, one always chooses, makes distinctions, etc.——as I choose this varied and synthetic process over some other. The question confronting the man the table the small pile of mechanical images is why are necessary attachments made between things?? Why would you try to make "sense" out of the apparent "noise" of this picture [redacted] game?? Stop trying to shut off the bothersome noise——the symbols which you dont choose the symbols which "impose themselves" upon you and suddenly ——quiet. Immense fields precise as focussed film spread easily effortlessly beneath the eye the lens the hand raised in front of the face. In the moving car, sitting the way you are sitting now, the vacant sequences form beneath the tires, all the windows show blank and the sun glinting across the silvery dashboard fixtures the speedometer set at a steady 33 or 34 miles an hour. Look down into your hand: there is a small photograph you did not choose representing a landscape you do not know. Look out the window, scatter the photos, return the image of the

picture-game landscape

landscape back to the "source"; beneath the tires of the car the terms of your consciousness girlish fond hands proffer city chemistry the conclusions [redacted]——continuous possibilities for accepting a deep symbio-

34

tic relationship with the so-called "immediate environment" present themselves as a stretch of course black pavement ripping past the tape heads in the artificial analogue for continually artificial experience. Sitting here with typewriter, camera, tape recorder etc.——leaving imaginary gaps for all the photographs in the process——the "noise" of this picture-game persists without will, impressing upon you the fact that you must rip yourself out of language and re-establish yourself in nature——pull the wires on your categories, on your conditioned calm and brutality——for the photograph in your hand is all yours. Go to the empty room empty that is except for table, chair and incessant grey photos——windows open here to my right——

substitute photo—city alleyway

same incessant breeze blowing into the room [redacted] (also Nov. 16)——while you shuffle through the photographs you can code yourself a set of "meanings" if you like. Drop your hands to your [redacted] sides; they are heavy weights now at the ends of your arms, straighten at the elbows, reach out, grasp hold of this photograph——small indistinct city street damp black pavement——mounds of earth to the left, poles long low building, high bright spot from arc-lamp on its standard etc. in the low flat landscape. The muscles in

your arms are rigid, the glossy photo surface crinkles in the clutching fingers of your hand your hand the knuckles now gone white. Why dont

—photo as described – mounds of earth, building, lamp on standard etc.)

you choose instead the simple clear living space offered in the stacked up brown manila envelopes?? Manage to be without beauty, free of dreams——life of clear dreams, pools, moving cameras, located photo-surfaces etc. (Its the location of the [redacted] camera which most often determines the character of the particular space——physically youre transferred right there) As you clutch the photograph the image——a particular space——street curbstones, neat lawns etc., slips, vibrates, collapses under the pressure of your desires. All the other photographs clatter to the floor. Now you are left with a single valued section ——a single construction——and does it admit of others?

This condition of attachment will never admit of the "theory of sequences". The theory of sequences both presupposes dis-attachment and "creates" dis-attachment. Feeding the images through the frame of the viewer——a consistent relative surface in a continuum of constantly shifting area——sliding through discolored days and nights images which you dont choose and results you dont know——this ultimately physical (living) space——the rem-

35

2 Jeff Wall, pages 34–35 from *Landscape Manual*, 1969–1970. Photo: Courtesy of Jeff Wall and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

building activity, we are not shown any attractions that would justify treating this image as aiming at art. For an audience accustomed to deciphering the meaning of pictures, it scarcely registers at all. Nor do any formal concerns of the artist make themselves felt, unless we were to take their very absence as precisely Wall's point of interest. Perhaps it was, for this effect of absence and hollowness was precisely what the artist aimed to achieve some forty years earlier when he composed his *Landscape Manual* from snapshots he had taken on a drive (plate 2). *Landscape Manual* became a hybrid work, consisting of both photographs and texts, presented in a low-budget book that spread the images over fifty-six pages, and accompanied them with reflections on their status, their content, and their merit as a communication medium. Obvious parallels between this book and conceptual approaches to humdrum photography in Ed Ruscha's and Robert Smithson's contemporaneous works have already been pointed out by many critics and, for the moment, I will not delve deeper into this matter. Suffice it to say that Wall frankly admits the importance of Smithson's texts for his own work but that this conceals a complex relation. While Wall's deliberate seesawing between theoretical arguments and a more narrative tone in *Landscape Manual* is especially close to Smithson's example, it does not follow that his own contribution is a parodic encounter with journalism, even though he has characterized Smithson's work in these terms.[1] If the picture from his *Landscape Manual* were parodic, one would expect its blown-up version of 2003 to retain something of that tendency, but it does not. On the other hand, it is not easy to define what it does instead: The stand-alone photograph now lends itself to a framed presentation and facilitates absorptive contemplation. How-

ever, its hollowness remains the same; isolated from its original context, the picture's bluntness becomes even more striking than in the book. No trace of a story is left. We may or may not invent a narrative to contexualize what we see, thus walking the path Wall had laid out when he put a text to the picture back in 1970. Yet the emerging story would probably become ours rather than Wall's if we did.

It will become clear from what follows that this potential effect is in line with the aesthetic implications of other works by the artist, and I hope it will also become clear why Wall may have taken advantage of this new print, which was distributed as a benefit edition, to make a programmatic statement, and thereby to take another step towards the establishment of an increasingly self-referential oeuvre. My claim is that there is a drive behind Wall's variations of model and style that works as an integrative force. From this perspective, Wall's attempts to broaden the range of his referential network might be seen to imply a shift in his outlook on his own previous work, without however changing our view of his overall aims. This reasoning is not self-evident. Confronted with Wall's manifold use of models from the history of Western painting for his transparencies, Jean-François Chevrier argued in 1995 that each of these images developed 'its own specific programme', and that, while they might be seen as a corpus if assembled in an exhibition space, they nevertheless lack mutual dependency beyond their respective relation to the nature of the photographic process itself.[2] Chevrier's opinion was published even before Wall's return to black and white photography, which seemed to add further weight to his point, and also before Wall literally distinguished between 'realism' and 'ambitious fantasies' in his work, the latter rated by yet another writer as 'mutually incompatible'.[3] That said, there are also opposing views. Another essay, published in the same volume from 1995 that contains Chevrier's piece, argues that Wall's still lifes, although they appear remote from his more openly staged narratives, are 'not so different' after all.[4] Adherents to both these positions can easily be found. Wall himself has both stated that his attitude towards photography was undergoing a change at that point, and, on other occasions, preferred to emphasize the coherence and continuity of his work; indeed he has sometimes argued both positions simultaneously.[5] Consequently, Wall's interviews are not a reliable source when it comes to the question of how viewers should construct artistic contexts for his different genres. As can be derived from what is suggested above, neither of the two perspectives is sufficient. Perhaps we should admit the instability of our attitude towards his varying approaches, and change our perspective accordingly, asking instead why it does not seem possible to arrive at an unambiguous interpretation of Wall's overall ambition.

It is true, however, that Wall has decided at least once to reinvent his techniques and style, and the most promising way to answer our question is therefore to put some pressure on this most obvious shift in the artist's aesthetic attitudes. In the light of this shift, the single print from Wall's *Landscape Manual* marks only the latest step of a gradual process initiated when Wall started to reintegrate black and white photography in his production in 1996. Since then, documentary photography has occupied an important place in the artist's work, and in his catalogue raisonné from 2005 a systematic division is made between cinemato-

graphic and documentary photographs, according to Wall's own use of the terms. At the same time, the catalogue raisonné shows that the shift cannot have signalled an 'ontological turn', as Michael Fried claimed some years ago.[6] For, in retrospect, Wall ascribes the quality of the 'documentary' to transparencies that had been created years before he became involved in black and white photography again, and some of the pictures thus characterized might, if jugded according to how they look, easily pass as part of his cinema-based art. Others, though called 'cinematographic' in the catalogue entries, do not show any signs of narrative and visually might better fit with what we know as straight photography (Wall calls them cinematographic because some arrangement or posing took place before the shot). What is more, for Wall, black and white printing did not, and still does not, exclude staging and deliberate story-telling. The importance of the light-box, which initially contributed more to the cinematographic effects of his works than any of their other features, is certainly obscured by this shift, which has been criticized as a growing aesthetic conservatism on Wall's part.[7] An implicit confirmation of this view may be found, for example, in a recent essay on one of his less-frequently discussed transparencies. While dealing with the iconography of *A Donkey in Blackpool* from 1999, Steve Edwards hardly engages with the specifics of the photographic medium in this or any other picture by Wall.[8] To judge by this, the medium-specific features of the illuminated box, once considered a critical contribution to enlightenment by the artist and by his commentators, and consequently placed in the forefront of its theoretical discussion, have lately become more marginal. This should not come as a surprise, representing, as it does, an effect of Wall's own constant appeals to the legacy of European old master painting. His photograph of a donkey was produced for an exhibition for which contemporary artists had been asked to engage with an old master painting of their choice. In fact, Wall might be said to think of almost his entire oeuvre in terms of such possible or actual gallery encounters, and so as obliged to pursue attention-seeking strategies along the lines of those nineteenth-century painters who had to secure a high visual profile for their works when it came to the annual public salons. The assistance given by transparencies in this respect should not be ignored. Electric illumination cannot be regarded unequivocally as a critical tool once the works become integrated into the canon of art. However, Wall himself has recently been downgrading the pre-eminence of the backlit image, occasionally at least, by way of his interest in traditional photographic printmaking. As such it becomes more important to ask why he is continuously pursuing both tracks, notoriously referring, on the one hand, to sources from Brueghel and Caravaggio via Poussin and Chardin to Delacroix and Manet, while, on the other hand, evoking the traditions of narrative cinema and straight documentary photography alike.

Admittedly, Wall's manner of self-fashioning has perhaps slightly shifted over time. While the artist argued early on in his career that he had never seen himself as a photographer, he stressed on a later occasion that he has always practised 'straight photography' along with 'cinematography', and that he considers both 'equally legitimate'. This is, of course, Wall's perogrative, but it is not clear from these statements whether the legitimacy of both strategies is based on acknowledging their respective features and aims. Although Wall recognizes 'photography's unique properties', he does not see any conceptual conflict

between cinematography and reportage, and does not acknowledge a sharp opposition between 'reportage' or 'documentary' on the one hand, and 'fiction' on the other.[9] As a consequence, the terms no longer point to a distinctive programmatic commitment. Just as one might be surprised to note that Wall does not accept a clear distinction between the different style and medium concepts on which he has based his work, one might also feel puzzled by this amalgamation of traditional genre categories. But there is one perspective from which it does make sense. All we need to forget is that the 'documentary' is usually understood as a visual genre with specific characteristics, including the implication that the photographer is operating in a non-artistic way. Wall, however, considers the term from the perspective of the artist's relation to his medium, thereby conflating its concerns with those of artistic style. He adheres to straight photography's outright identification with the documentary, and thus takes up the problem where Walker Evans left off. Evans had become involved in documentary campaigns in the 1930s, and had produced his most compelling pictures in this context, self-reflective as his aesthetic approach had been at the time. In his later years, however, Evans argued that art can never be a document but has the ability to adopt its style, thereby expunging the thin line that separated his early work from fine art. Wall, in turn, has never allowed any doubt that he acts within the boundaries of the artworld, and his concept of the documentary is much less close to Evans' early practice than to his famous last formulation.[10] In Wall's terms, the documentary is again a matter of style, and 'near documentary' may be translated as a contemporary version of traditional realism, supported by the truth claims of the photographic. Ultimately, we can take Wall's use of the term documentary as a means of reinforcing what a commitment to realism used to express when styles were taken as a statement of aesthetic beliefs. Wall is still a 'realist', even if a less straightforward one than Evans.

In light of this, it comes as no surprise that Evans, as a documentary photographer, is among the forerunners claimed by Wall for his own large-scale depictions of modern life. When Wall looks back at his earlier aesthetic experiences in a text of 2003, he gives a very idiosyncratic interpretation of Sherrie Levine's notorious appropriation of several venerable masterpieces of straight photography, interpreting her strategy as a homage to the value of the masters, which he presents as unsurpassed and lasting. In fact, he takes Levine's appropriations as an attempt to identify with the practices cited rather than with the practice of citation itself. Even if Wall were stimulated by Levine's own earlier complaints about critics who avoided 'looking at the work, looking inside the frame', his view of her work obviously departs from what is usually accepted as Levine's postmodernist formation.[11] However, let us assume for a moment that this view is persuasive, and get back to his puzzling *After Landscape Manual*, which I discussed at the outset. Levine's prints had been entitled *After Edward Weston*, *After Walker Evans*, and *After Alexander Rodchenko*. Should we therefore feel invited to see Wall's revision of his own earlier original in the same light as his remarks on Levine? Does Wall bow in the face of his own early photography's uncorrupted, straight gaze? Is his picture, in its present guise, an attempt to save from the shipwreck of conceptual art those things that are still valid today? Or is he merely offering a nostalgic citation of what was once a



3 Jeff Wall, *Concrete Ball*, 2002. Transparency in light-box, 204 × 260 cm. New York: Marian Goodman Gallery. Photo: Courtesy of Jeff Wall and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

genuine aesthetic experience? In sum, the question is whether Wall's picture is a view in its present guise, or a view of a view. The title implies the latter, especially if we recall Levine's position in the theoretical framework of postmodernism. If, however, we take it as an allusion to Wall's appraisal of her achievement, it implies the contrary, and I tend to the second option. But the question is further complicated because the original source is excluded by Wall from his catalogue raisonné as if to obscure the fact that the picture had its roots within a different framework.[12] If Wall's version was intended as a celebration of the original, why was the original then neglected in the list of works? In fact, the print's title gives it an almost Hegelian touch: this photograph abolishes, preserves, and elevates conceptual photography in a single gesture. In this respect, *After Landscape Manual* is the perfect emblem of Wall's perspective on photography after conceptual art and, so to speak, after Sherrie Levine. The artistic gesture of self-appropriation turns out to carry a very high significance. The picture itself, however, has not become more complex as a result of its post-conceptual afterlife. We have to be aware that Wall's afterthoughts on conceptual photography are as partial as the framed view from his car. They are designed to invest his later practice with the legitimacy of an heir to the very essence of photography. At the end of his long discussion of photography's passage through modernism, Wall concludes that what the medium promises

to its audience is an 'experience of experience'.[13] Apparently, he intends by this to defend photography from Theodor W. Adorno's verdict that truly modern art memorializes the absence of genuine experience under the conditions of modernity. It is obviously not easy to explain how photography, as an art form, can offer direct access to authentic experience if painting cannot. Wall probably feels compelled to distinguish between the two media in order to to give photography a history in its own right, and to grant distinct tasks and legitimate claims to painting and photography as separate genres.[14] But it seems that, in this respect, he goes too far. And if we disburden the phrase of its self-reflective twist, flamboyant yet unfathomable at this point in Wall's argument, we find ourselves confronted with a quite traditional celebration of photography's connection to the experience of the world outside art. Wall would probably not deny that. When it comes to discussions of photography's medium specificities in his writings and interviews, he tends to grant it a privileged contact with reality. The isolation of *After Landscape Manual* from the *Landscape Manual* itself confirms this tendency, as it eliminates the text, and thus cuts off the context that had once mediated experience; it offers the experience of a view without the distanciating effect of Wall's comments.

A similar strategy of offering space for the viewer's private imaginative projection can be found in Wall's landscapes and related subjects. Some of his more recent cityscapes, interiors and landscapes look like empty stages, ready to receive performances (plate 3). At any rate, this is what several authors have declared, and we may feel inclined to make this perspective our own. But what makes us think that we get it right if we subscribe to this idea, suggestive as it is? It is worth remembering that allegorical readings of this kind have not always been taken for granted by photography critics. In a generally negative review written on the occasion of an Edward Weston exhibition in 1946, Clement Greenberg surprisingly praised several photographs of painted Hollywood 'ghost sets'[15] (plate 4). Given Weston's play with layers of reality in these unusual



4 Edward Weston, *Movie set [Twentieth Century Fox; pool hall]*, 1940. Black and white photograph, 19.2 × 24.4 cm. Tucson, AZ: Center for Creative Photography. Photo: Courtesy of Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona.



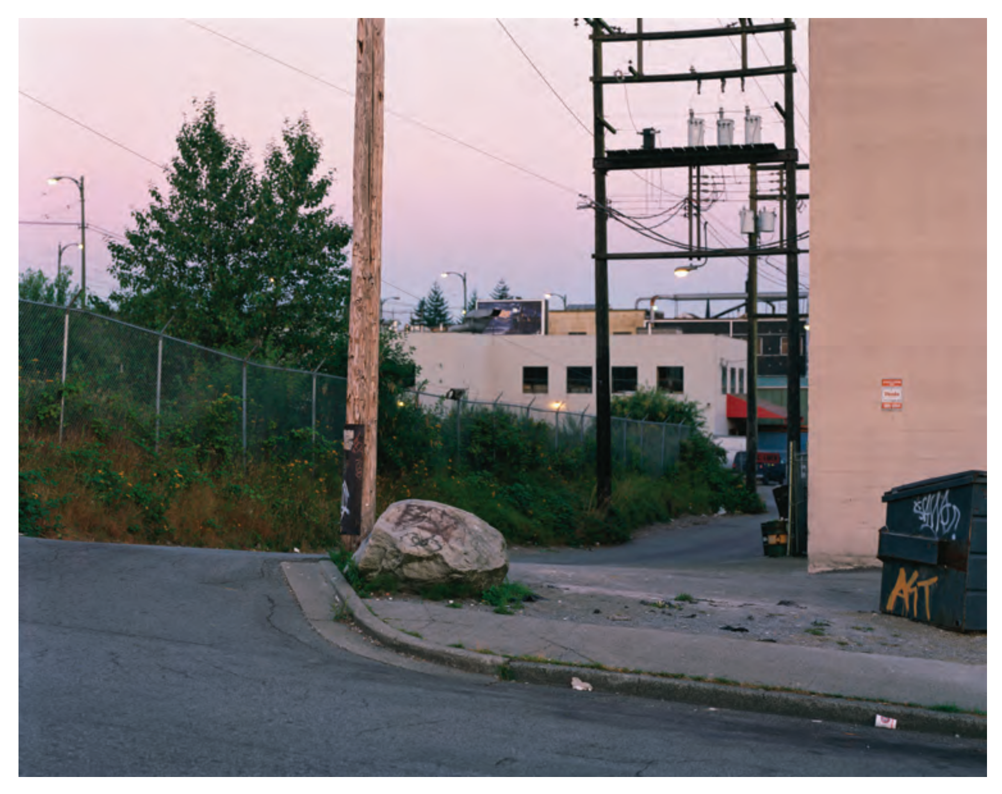
5 Jeff Wall, *Still Creek, Vancouver, Winter 2003*, 2003. Transparency in light-box, 202.5 × 259.5 cm. Photo: Courtesy of Jeff Wall and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

pictures, it is certainly appropriate to single them out among his works. And yet Greenberg, his predilection for documentary photography notwithstanding, did not point to the disturbing fact that he was looking at the unmasked backgrounds for the staging of films. Rather, he felt attracted by the stylistic unity of the picture surface: nothing ghostly about the sets, according to him. Conversely, Eugène Atget's more famous pictures of lifeless Parisian streets had once been conceptualized by the artist as plain documents, as reference material, and they became stages for implied narratives – for crime scenes, as Walter Benjamin was to put it – only once writers or artists annexed them for their own imaginary purposes later on.[16] The evidence of Wall's individual pictures is arguably not decisive in this respect. While his silent streets and landscapes are certainly very evocative in some ways, this is not necessarily because of any particular intrinsic narrative feature. If you are, for example, ready to imagine events on the site of Wall's *Still Creek* of 2003, you may have been prepared by *The Drain*, which depicted the same location as a background for a staged situation in 1989 (plates 5 and 6). While this is, admittedly, an exceptional example of a revised set, we can nevertheless see its effect as revelatory in general terms. When working on a photograph in 2001 that had originally been conceived cinematographically, Wall introduced a sense of suspended narration by deciding to delete the figures from the foreground, as though cancelling a scheduled stage performance[17]



6 Jeff Wall, *The Drain*, 1989. Transparency in light-box, 229 × 179 cm. Düsseldorf: Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen. Photo: Courtesy of Jeff Wall and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

(plate 7). The effect of the picture's title thus made nature the main actor in an otherwise boring commercial district. But this rosy dawn is not enough to keep the phantasy of its viewers occupied. They are likely to wonder why this site was depicted at all. They might guess that Atget had influenced Wall at that time, and project onto Wall's images what was previously said by critics of Atget's empty street scenes (plate 8). Induced by their knowledge of the more explicit encounter with the cinema in Wall's earlier work, they might also recall establishing shots in feature films, allowing countless fragmentary narratives to be engendered. Chevrier confirms as much when he claims that the view reminds him of 'pictures of ambiguous urban encounters', while Camiel van Winkel described a similar impression from one of Wall's earlier documentary interiors when he argued that, even after the removal of all the props from the depicted room, some 'artificial reality' dominates the scene.[18] I do not want to deny the possibility of such a reading. It is true that Wall's documentary pictures frequently retain narrative aspects introduced by their cinematographic counterparts, and vice versa.[19] But this is neither the exclusive result of their own internal arrangement, nor of any specificity of the medium. An essay by Thierry de Duve implicitly suggests another explanation. De Duve manipulated *The Drain* – though only in his imagination – when he suggested to his readers that they substract the figures from the middleground of Wall's scene. In the critic's eyes, however, this imagi-



7 Jeff Wall, *Dawn*, 2001. Transparency in light-box, 230 × 293 cm. Zürich: Collection Ringier. Photo: Courtesy of Jeff Wall and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

native experiment did not enhance the documentary value of the landscape. On the contrary, de Duve thereby discovered a landscape that reminded him so strongly of Cézanne that in his subsequent remarks he came close to describing it as an abstract composition.[20] With de Duve's somewhat surprising interpretative process and its results in mind, I want to suggest that the production of meaning in Wall's documentary pictures is dependent upon the transport of interpretative models from one genre to another. Furthermore, it is the result of a deliberate contextualization in artistic tradition, first and foremost admidst his own pictorial contributions. It is, in other words, the documentary pictures' place in Wall's own oeuvre that adds meaning to their form and content, and Wall may well have aimed at putting the rule to the test when he photographed *Still Creek*, in which de Duve's suggestion seems to resonate, yet without effectively resulting in abstraction. Confirmation can also be found in an essay by Chevrier where it is argued that Wall's *Citizen*, while imitating a snapshot through careful arrangement, is in fact an image of civic peace rather than 'an image of leisure time in the park' (plate 9). The very structure of this argument, however, precludes us from finding its basis in the picture itself. If we want to find civic peace here, we must first grasp an allegorical vocabulary, which is not consonant with the look of a snapshot however artificially it might be achieved. Chevrier seems to be aware of this fact. In order to explain his reading, he puts himself in



8 Eugène Atget, *Rue St. Rustique*, 1922. Toned gelatin silver print, 21.7 × 17.5 cm. Washington, DC: Library of Congress. Photo: Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

the place of the depicted person, and imagines that the public space of the park may be experienced as a refuge from the social violence that is frequently shown in Wall's earlier work.[21] Convincing or not in terms of the picture's narrative, this approach gives a reading of photography against the grain: uncodified everyday reality, as supposedly recorded by the medium, cannot be taken as the basis of the kind of meaning an allegorical interpretation would claim to find in the work.

At the beginning of this chapter, I evoked an audience accustomed to deciphering the meaning of pictures. We are, and yet we are not, such an audience. Decades of exposure to the plainest, most ostentiously meaningless documentary pictures in the artworld have prepared us for the absence of depth and complexity deliberately adopted by some artists. Yet there is evidence from the critical texts I have discussed that this condition does not apply without qualification to our response to Wall. The more his work develops, the harder it becomes for viewers to escape the codified network of meanings that he has established for it. His oeuvre as a whole tends to build up an inclusive reference system that underlies each of the individual works, their splendid isolation on museum walls notwithstanding. It does not do so exclusively by referring to the old masters of Western painting. What is more, the range of traditions becomes internalized, as it were, in Wall's work as it embodies a whole revitalized history of photographic concepts. Atget and Evans provide the most prominent paradigms in this respect, but theirs are not the only ones. Take, for example, Wall's

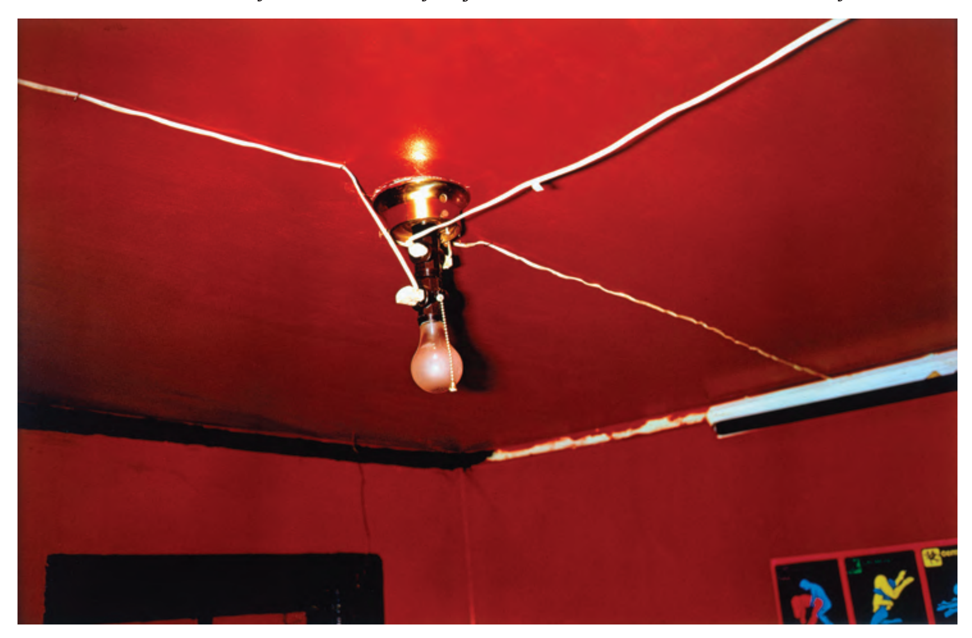


9 Jeff Wall, *Citizen*, 1996. Silver gelatine print, 181 × 234 cm. Montréal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Photo: Courtesy of Jeff Wall and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

pictures of interior structures and his diagonal compositions. They are partly modernist in their formalistic approach, and, if references need to be named, the avant-garde photography of the 1920s would be a candidate alongside William Eggleston's obsession with colour effects in vernacular architecture (plates 10 and 11). Eggleston, of course, is also a precursor of Wall's *Peas and Sauce* still life, which brings us back to reportage photography effects. But there are also references to a more classical concept in some of Wall's black and white pictures. In his *Shapes on a Tree* from 1998, concerns with the structure of nature's surface remind us of Weston, and so does the cropping of Wall's *Torso* from 1997 which seems to echo Weston's series of his son Neil's torso from 1925 (plate 12). Weston was always in search of formulae for beauty in photography, and harked back to the set phrases of classical art in order to achieve them.[22] Consequently, he might be considered an inappropriate model for an artist who has continuously stressed his preoccupation with the depiction of modern life. What is more, Wall has acknowledged that he is familiar with Greenberg's polemic against Weston, who, in the eyes of this critic, had lost his way by attempting to align his pictures with the aesthetics of modernist abstraction.[23] Yet it seems that Wall is interested in precisely this matter. Although de Duve has convincingly argued that Wall's confirmed interest in Greenberg's text can be explained by their shared belief in photography's material and ideological transparency, a different explanation needs to be found



10 Jeff Wall, *A Wall in a Former Bakery*, 2003. Transparency in light-box, 119 × 151 cm. New York: Marian Goodman Gallery. Photo: Courtesy of Jeff Wall and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.



11 William Eggleston, *Untitled (Red Ceiling, Greenwood, Mississippi, 1973)*. Dye transfer print, 20 × 24 cm. Photo: © 2007 Eggleston Artistic Trust. Courtesy of Cheim and Read, New York. Used with permission.

for his return to modernist photography of the kind explored by Weston several decades ago. Wall's *Shapes on a Tree* is arguably a picture concerned with the very formal values, structural and tonal alike, that had so horrified Greenberg in Weston's prints. If Weston's idiom does indeed provide another context when adopted by Wall, this is due to our preconception, based on Wall's work as a whole, that he is interested in giving it a realistic bias.

Again, this is a realism that has nothing to do with the world's spontanously depicting itself. A second glance at Wall's *Torso* reaffirms the point. In my view, the most attractive feature of the picture is the dirt on the shirt of the little boy. At first sight, I liked it as much as Camille Recht, who, evoking early photography in an essay on Atget, once said he liked the dirt on the shoes of an unknown peasant on an old professional studio portrait.[24] He saw in that staged photograph a richer dust than any other medium could provide, trusting that a trace of reality had been retained in the print. My feelings seemed to be of nearly the same kind when I compared Wall's *Torso* with his other works, including his studies after nature, and for a moment I wondered if I were being exposed to a sensation best explained in terms of Roland Barthes' much-cited 'punctum'. However, I soon gave up this idea, as the deliberate composition made it seem unlikely that anything had got into this picture by accident. Consequently, I do not suscribe to Craig Burnett's belief that this composition can appropriately be called a documentary, let alone a sketchy picture. In his catalogue raisonné, Wall calls it 'cinematographic', and there can be no doubt that he cared for the stains more than the anonymous studio photographer had done when he portrayed the peasant so long ago.[25] Wall may have been well aware of the possibility of reading this image as an ironic counter to Weston, that is, an evocation of beauty in the everyday that advances a kitchen-sink realism against neo-classicist aesthetics. Yet though the tastes of the artists apparently differ, it is important to note the strategic relevance of such dialogues. Photography attains the same level of formal ambition as the traditional arts, whatever the actual relation of the individual pictures to their sources might be. Wall's black and white prints can, for the same reason, profit from cinema, neo-avant-garde, and the Western pictorial tradition built into his 'cinematography' no less than his transparencies, which compete more obviously with traditional values. His prints thereby help to pave the way for a pictorial art that may, as Wall puts it, 'include both fact and artifice, tradition and the new, memory and new technologies'.[26] At the same time, the photographic connection of his transparencies with the real world is confirmed by their increasingly being merged with the documentary tradition, reinforced by Wall's blurring of the categorial boundaries between the two kinds of picture-making. Accordingly, we are confronted with an enormous appetite for references even in Wall's straight photography. All this taken into account, Wall reminds me of a character invented by the Austrian writer Heimito von Doderer for his novel *The Merovingians or the Total Family* of 1962. Very loosely based on the personality of a medieval king, but transferred to the twentieth century, this character, who seeks to increase his sovereign power, attempts to become his own father and grandfather, his nephew and uncle, and more of the kind, by a sequence of strategically planned marriages to, and adoptions of, members of his family, thus uniting under one roof as many



12 Jeff Wall, *Torso*, 1997. Silver gelatine print, 24.5 × 19.1 cm. Edition for documenta X. Photo: Courtesy of Jeff Wall and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

heritages and fiefdoms as possible. I do not want you to take this comparison as my attempt to ridicule Wall's serious endeavour to draw inspiration from the traditions of Western art. Yet his attitude towards art history – Merovingian in Doderer's terms – might indeed be driven by similar aims.[27] *After Landscape Manual*, which I chose as the primary example for this chapter because it demonstrates Wall's ambiguous reconciliation with his own conceptualism's claim on the documentary, is only the latest in a long line of attempts to make his work a repository of complex meaning as defined by the overlapping discourses of art, art criticism, and the historiography of art.

We might at first assume that the more an artist draws from a wide range of stylistic sources and genres, the more his work will become polysemic and inconsistent. Complex anti-systematic aesthetic strategies can be nourished thus. In the case of Wall, however, enlarging the network of references and – more importantly – of processes and techniques is about cluster-building and consoli-

dation. Wall's *Storyteller* is arguably not much closer to Édouard Manet than the latter's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* was to Marcantonio Raimondi's sixteenth-century *Judgement of Paris* engraving, which had served as a model for Manet's own composition of figures. Nor is Manet close to other painters cited in Wall's work. Such widespread references make sense only because what Wall wants to mirror is the wordly, and supposedly subversive, character of their pictures. In doing so, he is mainly responding to conceptions of reality found in contemporary discussions of the social meaning of images.[28] Consequently, nearly the entire tradition of narrative Western painting is synthesized in a practice that wants to be read in terms of realistic style, while at the same time this realism is premised on the causal dependence of photography on the world. Wall thus merges style and medium in a remarkable move. To reiterate, why did it become necessary? The exploration of documentary trends in some of Wall's works testifies to an assumption that art photography connects with the outer world, and without this asumption his overall aims lose some of their authority. Having said this, there is no evidence of a 'system of photography' in Wall's work that keeps it developing.[29] Rather than following Shepherd Steiner in that argument, which gives all the credit to the logic inherent to a single aesthetic concept, we should posit, as one basis for the artist's deliberate changes and revisions, his wish to associate additional layers of meaning and relevance with his work. From this perspective, there is neither a simple pairing of different aims, nor a change of beliefs, but rather the increasing density of an oeuvre that struggles for sustainability in the developing discourse. Wall wants each individual part of it to be understood in the light of what the others have achieved in his own eyes and those of his commentators. Hence, that Wall adheres to the integrative identity of his oeuvre, meandering through genres and art history as it does, can be read as a coherent position. In a conversation with Chevrier, Wall declared that he would appreciate seeing his black and white pictures exhibited alongside his grotesque imagery, arguing that the fact that both are photographs subliminally connects the two groups of works.[30] As a matter of fact, such very different approaches need each other in order to meet their author's desire to give his pictures a complex meaning and critical contemporaneity alike. Wall wants them to show codified gestures and the autonomy of art on the one hand, and reality and the constraints of social forces on the other. He ascribes to them the power simultaneously to express the individual freedom of the artist as well as the accidents of the outer world and, particularly in his colour transparencies, the subtle and sophisticated impact of uncontrolled facts on pictures that are obviously artificially staged.[31] In 1995, Wall described the tension between form and content as a record 'of our social experience of tormented development, that which is not achieved or realized, or that which, in being realized, is ruined – and also all the unresolved grey areas in between where hope and alternatives reside'.[32] To make this evident is not an easy task, and it is possible that Wall has some doubts today whether his art can achieve this goal. Yet at a time when he did univocally associate his pictures with it, while probably questioning the possibility that any single pictorial code or framework could bear this burden in isolation, his strategy was a continuous extension of coherent conceptual devices. Since then, we have witnessed an increasing breadth of perspectives, styles and genres in Wall's works. In them, I tend to see neither a development according to a consistent

programme, nor monads that express unity and completeness without mutually affecting each other. Rather, we should understand that an extrinsic discourse on art history in general affects it, and that our voices intermingle with the artist's in his work. This does not necessarily mean that he is obedient in any way to the arguments of his supporters and adversaries. It does mean, however, that variations in his methods, in his motifs, and in his use of the medium might be best understood as continuous footnotes, glosses, and exemplifications of conceptual claims, driven by an ongoing debate on the meanings and the value of reality and realism in art. It is only 'after cinematography', and against its backdrop, that a reading that finds the very image of civic peace in the photograph of a sleeping man can hope to make sense.

Notes

1 Jeff Wall, '"Marks of indifference": aspects of photography in, or as, conceptual art', in Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer, eds, *Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965–1975*, Los Angeles, CA, 1995, 247–67, 254. See, on the relevance of Ruscha and Smithson for the *Landscape Manual*, and on the latter's concept, Scott Watson, 'Discovering the defeatured landscape', in Stan Douglas, ed., *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art*, Vancouver, 1991, 247–65, 252–3.

2 Jean-François Chevrier, 'Play, drama, enigma', *Jeff Wall*, Chicago, IL, 1995, 11–16, 12.

3 Peter Galassi, 'Unorthodox', in Galassi and Neal Benezra, *Jeff Wall*, New York, 2007, 13–65, 52.

4 Briony Fer, 'The space of anxiety', in *Jeff Wall*, 1995, 23–6, 25.

5 When talking to Boris Groys, 'Photography and strategies of the avant-garde' [1998], in Rolf Lauter, ed., *Jeff Wall. Figures and Places: Selected Works 1978–2000*, München, 2001, 138–41, 138, Wall described his changing relation to photography. In an interview with Arielle Pelenc, 'Correspondence with Jeff Wall' [1996], in Thierry de Duve et al., *Jeff Wall*, 2nd edn, revised and expanded, London, 2002, 8–23, 13, he described his 'phantasy pictures' as an extension of what had always been present. In another interview with Martin Schwander, 'Jeff Wall interviewed by Martin Schwander', in Schwander, ed., *Restoration*, Basel, 1994, 22–30, 29, he argued that he followed simultaneously different paths.

6 Michael Fried, 'Being there: on two Pictures by Jeff Wall', *Artforum*, 43, 1, 2004, 53–4, 53.

7 Sven Lütticken, 'The story of art according to Jeff Wall', *Secret Publicity: Essays on Contemporary Art*, Rotterdam, 2006, 69–82, passim, esp. 77, where the disappearance of critical comments on mass media from Wall's work is subject to a disparaging review.

8 See Steve Edwards, '"Poor ass!" (*A Donkey in Blackpool*, 1999)', *Oxford Art Journal*, 30, 1, 2007, 39–54. Replace, in his text, each occurrence of the word 'photograph' by 'picture', and each occurrence of 'photographer' by 'picture-maker'. Neither any alteration of the meaning nor any obscurity will result from doing so.

9 Pelenc, 'Correspondence', 9 and 23 (for the first set of terms), and Wall's letter to Christine Walter from May 2000, cited by her in *Bilder erzählen! Positionen inszenierter Fotografie: Eileen Cowin, Jeff Wall, Cindy Sherman, Anna Gaskell, Sharon Lockhart, Tracey Moffatt, Sam Taylor-Wood*, Weimar, 2002, 122 (for the second set): 'Photography exists in the interaction between those qualities, which are always present somehow, in every photograph.'

10 For a discussion of Evans' retrospective response to his own work, see Wolfgang Brückle, 'On documentary style: "anti-graphic photography" between the wars', *History of Photography*, 30, 1, 2006, 68–79, esp. 79. On Wall's 'non-medium specific conception of the pictorial', see Diarmuid Costello, 'On the very idea of a specific medium: Michael Fried and Stanley Cavell on painting and photography as arts', *Critical Inquiry*, 34, 2008, 274–312, 299–300, where the issue is considered from a systematic point of view.

11 Jeff Wall, 'Frames of reference', *Artforum*, 42, 1, 2003, 188–92, 188. For Levine's statement, cf. Gerald Marzorati, 'Art in the (re)making', *Artnews*, 85, 5, 1986, 91–9, 97.

12 See Theodora Vischer and Heidi Naef, eds, *Jeff Wall: Catalogue raisonné, 1978–2004*, Göttingen, 2005, cat.-no. 118, 428–9, where a description of the *Landscape Manual* is given, without, however, allowing it to enter the body of work as defined by the catalogue entries. Wall is certainly aware of the context-making effects provoked by this strategy of exclusion. His training as an art

historian is no doubt important in this respect. At the same time, it should be noted that his shaping of his oeuvre's boundaries is in line with the self-indexing activities of some of his colleagues. See, for a general account of this contemporary tendency, Peter J. Schneemann, 'Eigennutz: Das Interesse von Künstlern am Werkkatalog', *Zeitschrift für Schweizerische Archologie und Kunstgeschichte*, 62, 2005, 217–23.

13 Wall, '"Marks of indifference"', 266.

14 While the 'experience of experience' might also be understood in Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel's or Hans Georg Gadamer's terms, it is likely that in this context it is meant to evoke Adorno. This becomes obvious when the term is read against the background of Wall's own earlier 'Note on movie audience', which was written to accompany an exhibition of his works. Here Wall not only claims that 'the modernist image is knowingly experienced as an experience of estrangement', but also mentions the 'culture industry' in the same paragraph. See Jeff Wall, 'A note on movie audience' [1984], *Jeff Wall: Catalogue raisonné*, 280–2, 280 and 281, and Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* [1970], newly trans. and ed. by Robert Hullot-Kentor, London, 1997, 34 and passim (esp. 110–1, 333). Watson, 'Defeatured landscape', 257, makes the point that in his *Landscape Manual*, Wall displayed the failure to establish an authentic relation to the reality of experience. If this was the lesson Wall wanted his audience to learn from his early work, his perspective obviously was to change.

15 See Clement Greenberg, 'The camera's glass eye: review of an exhibition of Edward Weston' [1946], *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949* (The Collected Essays and Criticism, vol. 2), ed. John O'Brien, Chicago, IL and London, 1986, 60–3, 63.

16 Walter Benjamin, 'Little history of photography', *Selected Writings*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, vol. 2 (1927–1934), Cambridge and London, 1999, 507–30, 527. It should be noted that the term, albeit usually credited to Benjamin, actually derives from Camille Recht, who, in his introduction to *Atget Lichtbilder*, Paris and Leipzig, 1930, n.p., 5–28, 15, drew the comparison with a 'Polizeiphotographie am Tatort'. However, it was Benjamin who turned the metaphor into a theoretical device.

17 Wall's commentary in Jean-Pierre Criqui, 'Interview with Jeff Wall', in *Correspondances: Jeff Wall/ Paul Cézanne*, Paris, 2006, 30–53, 31, in which the artist also admits that he was impressed by Atget's work at that time.

18 See Jean-François Chevrier, 'The spectres of the everyday', in *Jeff Wall*, 2002, 164–89, 188, and Camiel van Winkel, 'Jeff Wall: photography as proof of photography', in Hasselblad Center Göteborg, ed., *Jeff Wall: Photographs*, Göttingen, 2002, n.p., 7–13, 12.

19 Criqui, 'Interview with Jeff Wall', 36.

20 See Thierry De Duve, 'The mainstream and the crooked path', in *Jeff Wall*, 2002, 26–55, 36.

21 See Chevrier, 'Spectres', 169–73. Chevrier also argues that *The Well* was taken up again metaphorically in *An Encounter in the Calle Valentin Gomez Farias, Tijuana*, and was brought to a culmination with the recent sumptuous *Flooded Grave*, thus making a point that is not in line with his previous characterization of the oeuvre as an assembly of isolated programmes.

22 The very idea of the torso as a repository for beauty is, of course, neo-classical, and became a support for formalistic preoccupations in modernist art. John Szarkowski's remarks on a Weston 'Torso of Neil' from 1925 in his *Looking at Photographs: 100 Pictures from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art*, New York, 1973, 84, are symptomatic in this respect. (More examples from the same series are reproduced in Gilles Mora, ed., *Edward Weston: Forms of Passion, Passion of Forms*, London, 1995, 102–3, and in Elena Lukaszewicz, ed., *Edward Weston*, Manchester, 1998, 20.) For a more general discussion, see Katrin Elvers-Švamberk, 'Von Rodin bis Baselitz: Der Torso in der Skulptur der Moderne', in Elvers-Švamberk and Wolfgang Brückle, *Von Rodin bis Baselitz: Der Torso in der Skulptur der Moderne*, Ostfildern-Ruit, 2001, 13–84.

23 Wall's knowledge of the Greenberg text is reported by De Duve, 'The mainstream', 28–9.

24 Recht, *Atget*, n.p., 11.

25 Craig Burnett, 'Jeff Wall: black and white photographs 1996–2007', in *Jeff Wall: Black and White Photographs, 1996–2007*, London, 2007, n.p., 51–60, 51, and *Jeff Wall. Catalogue Raisonné*, cat.-no. 75, 382.

26 Wall in a letter to Christine Walter from May 2000, cited by Walter, *Bilder erzählen!*, 113.

27 In this respect, his most expansive figure of aesthetic thinking is probably his argument regarding the issue of scale, which leads him to imagine a viewer of Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (and, by implication, of his own large-scale pictures) standing on a Carl Andre sculpture. Cf. Wall, 'Frames of reference', 191.

28 Thomas Crow, 'Profane illuminations: the social history of Jeff Wall', *Art Forum*, 31:6, 1993, 62–9, gives an overview of Wall's keeping pace with the course of social art history in the 1970s. Interestingly, Wall has been involved in this discourse from his early comments on Manet onwards, and defines traditions in written form himself where professional art historical writing fails to find meaning in the combination of the models he refers to in his artistic decision-making: cf. Wall, 'Frames of reference', where the documentary and the fictional are, once again, guided to a marriage of true minds.

29 Shepherd Steiner, 'In other hands: Jeff Wall's Beispiel', *Oxford Art Journal*, 30, 1, 2007, 135–51, 151, where the opposite view is advanced.

30 Jeff Wall and Jean-François Chevrier, 'A painter of modern life' [i.e. 'At home at elsewhere', 1998/2001], in *Jeff Wall: Figures and Places*, 168–85, 182. Wall's black and white prints were actually shown in rooms of their own in the 2005 exhibitions at the Schaulager Basel and at the Tate Modern.

31 See Pelenc, 'Correspondance', 17 and 22, and Groys, 'Photography', 152–4.

32 Jeff Wall, 'About making landscapes' [1996], in *Jeff Wall*, 2002, 140–5, 144.



1 Jeff Wall, *Morning Cleaning, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona*, 1999. Transparency in light-box, 187 × 351 cm. Photo: © Jeff Wall.

Photography after Conceptual Art Edited by Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen
 ISBN: 978-1-444-33360-2

10

MORNING CLEANING: JEFF WALL AND *THE LARGE GLASS*

CHRISTINE CONLEY

Jeff Wall's *Morning Cleaning, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona*, 1999 (plate 1), is a photographic tableau characteristic of his practice since the early 1990s. It is a large format Cibachrome transparency, mounted on a light-box and employing digital technology to suture a montage of images into the seamless appearance of captured reality. The scene is the reconstruction, completed in 1986, of the much celebrated German National Pavilion, designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe for the 1929 International Exposition in Barcelona, and widely recognized as a pivotal example of modernist architecture. The ostensible subject is the morning ritual of cleaning the wide expanse of metal-framed glass that separates the interior of the pavilion from the transitional space of the courtyard with its reflecting pool. Through a film of soapy water we see Georg Kolbe's bronze sculpture *Dawn*,[1] poised at the far left of the pool and illuminated, like the interior wall of onyx doré, by the early morning sunlight that Wall recalls was optimal for a mere seven minute interval during each of the twelve or more days required to photograph this space.[2]

Penelope Curtis tells us that Mies used the figurative sculptures of Kolbe, along with those of Wilhelm Lehmbruck and Aristide Maillol, almost exclusively throughout his career, their curvaceous forms contrasting with the unadorned linearity of his designs. She uses the term 'eye-catcher' to account for the way in which Kolbe's *Dawn* extends our view through the glass to the pool beyond with its green marble walls, much like a ruin in a picturesque landscape.[3] Indeed, as can be seen in a *Berliner Bild-Bericht* photograph of the German Pavilion of 1929 (plate 2), the more than life-size figure of *Dawn* acts as a beacon to orient the viewer in relation to the pavilion's bewildering flow of transitional and overlapping spaces, multiply reflected in Mies's luxuriant surfaces of honed marble and glass.

But *Dawn* does not catch the eye of the window-cleaner, who remains oblivious to the allure of the Venus-like figure rising to meet the morning light, opening outwards in a 'centrifugal' unfolding, 'rippling in a manner suggestive of the pool where it stands', writes Curtis.[4] The veil of soapy water also ripples and blurs in ways that suggest a figure in suspended animation, creating an ambiguity between the animate and the inanimate that is, in a word, uncanny. However, the window-cleaner Alejandro – for elsewhere, Wall tells us his name[5] – is turned away from this erotic vision, bent intently over his bucket, preparing his squeegee

Publisher's Note:
Image not available
in the electronic edition

2 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (architect), Williams & Meyer Co. (photographic studio), Exterior view of the German Pavilion at the Barcelona International Exposition of 1929–30, Spain, with Georg Kolbe's bronze sculpture *Dawn*. Gelatine silver print, 16.6 × 22.3 cm. Montréal: Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture (Gift of Edward Austin Duckett). Photo: © CCA, Montréal/Lohan Associates/DACS, 2009.

Publisher's Note:
Image not available
in the electronic edition

3 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Interior view of the German Pavilion at the Barcelona International Exposition of 1929–30, Spain. Gelatine silver print, 16.5 × 22.5 cm. New York: Mies van der Rohe Archive, Museum of Modern Art (Gift of the architect, MMA 1814). Photo: © The Museum of Modern Art/SCALA/ARS, NY (2009)/DACS, 2009.

Publisher's Note:
Image not available
in the electronic edition

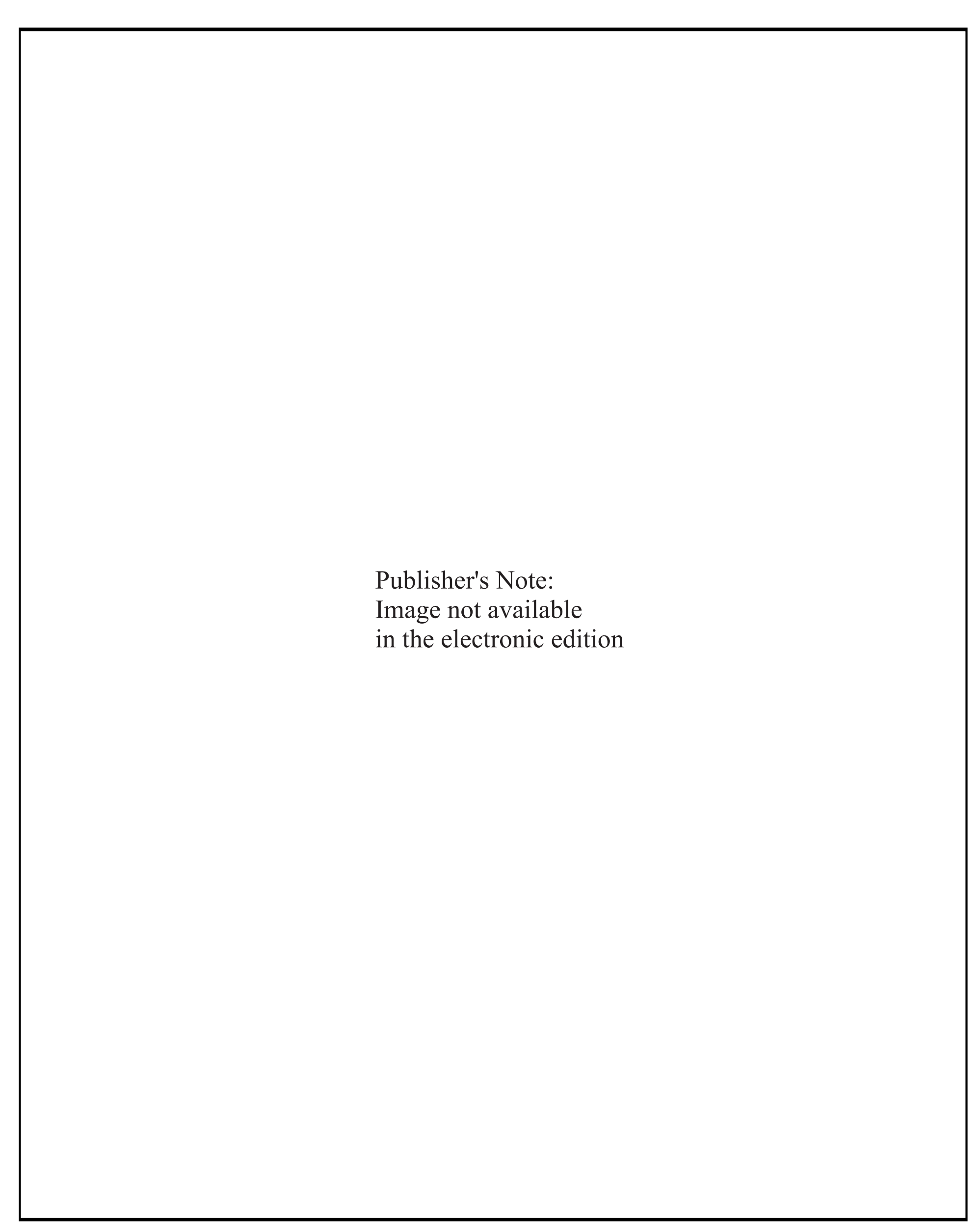
4 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (architect), Williams & Meyer Co. (photographic studio), Interior view of the German Pavilion at the Barcelona International Exposition, 1929–30, Barcelona, Spain. Gelatine silver print, 15.2 × 23.5 cm. Montréal: Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture (Gift of Edward Austin Duckett). Photo: © CCA, Montréal/Lohan Associates/DACS, 2009.

before removing the soapy screen. At the same time, he is equally oblivious to the gaze of the spectator.

It is this absorption in the task at hand that interests Michael Fried in his essay 'Jeff Wall, Wittgenstein, and the everyday', published in *Critical Inquiry* in 2007 and reprised in *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* in 2008. In a careful unpacking of passages from Wittgenstein's notebooks of 1930, Fried argues for the philosopher's ideal of metaphysical aloneness as a key to understanding the project of *Morning Cleaning*. Fried argues that Wittgenstein's thought-experiment, where he imagines 'a man who thinks he is unobserved performing some quite simple everyday activity as if in a theatre'[6] anticipates the 'near documentary' effect that Wall claims for his photographs: 'In some way they claim to be a plausible account of, or a report on, what the events depicted are like, or were like, when they passed without being photographed.'[7] Wittgenstein's desire for works of art that would constitute 'seeing life itself'[8] is understood by Fried to be an antitheatrical ideal for which Wall's cinematographic photography provides the salutary technology and technique. With its laborious and time consuming process of staging, of repeated film takes, and of painstaking digital manipulation, and, more, its final presentation as a back-lit transparency, Wall's photographic method answers the desire for a specific interplay of realism and artifice that Fried detects in Wittgenstein. Via comparison with similarly absorptive moments in the painting of Chardin and others, Fried concludes that *Morning Cleaning* is a reinterpretation or renewal 'across a jagged breach'[9] of the antitheatrical aims of the high modernist painting and sculpture he investigated in his essays of 1966–67, notably 'Art and objecthood'.

My difficulty with Fried's argument lies not with his claim for the absorptive state of the window-cleaner, which is readily apparent, but with how he limits his gender neutral analysis to focus exclusively upon the figure of the worker at the expense of other compelling features of Wall's photograph. Paramount here is the insistent bifurcation of the composition by Mies's trademark cruciform column, which bars, or at least persistently interrupts, any lateral traversal of the pictorial space between the figures of Alejandro and *Dawn*, window-cleaner and sculpture. This pictorial tension in *Morning Cleaning* is brought into focus if we compare it to the *Bild-Bericht* images of the German Pavilion (plates 3 and 4), taken from much the same vantage point but distinguished by their relative proximity to the cruciform column. In the first instance, distance allows the viewer to vicariously circumnavigate the column and the ceiling, whereas proximity in the second photo splits the image decisively. Wall's photograph takes up a position between these two, cropping the point of intersection between column and ceiling yet retaining a shallow foreground at floor level that invites a virtual entry into the broad pictorial space. The scale of *Morning Cleaning*, where the nickel-plated steel column is roughly the size of an adult figure, encourages an experience of the pictorial space as an illusionistic extension of embodied space. But the impulse to navigate that space visually is countered by the insistent presence of the column. Its spectral gleam doubles as a lure that retains the gaze of the spectator close to the picture plane and as a fractured reflection that suggests the extra-pictorial presence of the artist-photographer with his equipment.

This imaginary capture between animate and inanimate, male and female, is reminiscent of the dialectic of desire in Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass*, and



5 Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915–23. Oil, varnish, lead wire, lead foil, mirror silvering, and dust on two glass panels (cracked), each mounted between two glass panels, with five glass strips, aluminum foil, and a wood and steel frame, 277.5 × 175.8 cm. As installed by the artist at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art (Bequest of Katherine S. Dreier). Photo: © Succession Marcel Duchamp/ADAGP Paris/DACS, 2009.

indeed, my argument in what follows is that the pictorial relations in Wall's tableau may be understood quite differently from Fried's account, if we consider *Morning Cleaning* as a Duchampian delay.[10] The temporality of repetition and deferral in *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, 1915–23 (plate 5) is quite different from the timeless optical presentness that Fried advances. The bifurcated field of Duchamp's *Glass* interrupts the gaze of the modernist beholder, requiring a double look, or as Rosalind Krauss argues for Duchamp's precision optics, 'the blink of an eye'.[11]

ALLEGORICAL DESIRE AND THE POLITICS OF GLASS

The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even is shown in plate 5 as it was installed by the artist in the Philadelphia Museum of Art where Wall viewed it at the Duchamp retrospective mounted there in 1973–74.[12] Wall had just returned from London after three years of research on Duchamp towards a PhD in art history at the Courtauld Institute.[13] In an interview with Jean-François Chevrier, he recalls his encounter with Duchamp as a kind of epiphany:

> Then images started coming back to me, almost like childhood memories, images from the period in which Duchamp's work emerged: late Symbolism, Post-Impressionism, and so on. I had thought that Duchamp was important mainly for the way he participated in the destruction of that great pictorial culture. But the closer I looked, the more I saw him as a part of it. And through looking at his work I looked in a new way at everything around him, a way that reminded me of the enjoyment I'd experienced as a child in looking at books of reproductions of Seurat, Manet, or Brueghel. I thought I understood something of the real critical dimension of contemporary art: it wasn't a matter of attacking or destroying, not a question of violence; rather it was about a militant exploration of the legitimacy of tradition. That's how I began to define my own position, and how I still do now.[14]

Michael Newman has written persuasively on the decisive role of the French artist for Wall's negotiation of an exit from conceptualism and the development of his now familiar tableau transparencies in the late 1970s.[15] For Newman, the key work for Wall's new role as director of cinematographic photography was not the readymades, so crucial to conceptual art, but the elaborate staging of *Etant donnés* which reintroduced the pleasure of seeing bodies, albeit as a self-conscious act of voyeurism, and served as a model for 'constructing a picture or tableau that will prompt in the viewer a spectatorship that is both engaged – to the point of embarrassment indeed – and reflective, much like the attitude of the theatre audience proposed by Brecht'.[16] *The Large Glass* plays a lesser role in Newman's account, yet it is the allegorical desire of the latter that I propose played an important part in the conception of *Morning Cleaning*. While Duchamp's play with the stereoscopic view of *Etant donnés*, by way of its peepholes, reveals the desire in vision, it also arguably feeds the eye as *trompe l'oeil*, offering a degree of erotic plenitude. By contrast, the resolute separation of feminine and masculine spheres in *The Large Glass* denies this satisfaction, frustrates the desire for a unified view; in short, ushers in the decentred, split subject of repression and longing.

In *Morning Cleaning*, the signifying function of Mies's cruciform column, though it divides the picture vertically rather than horizontally, is analogous to the metal divide that bars any intercourse between Duchamp's two panes of glass and helps retain the focus of the viewer on the surface of *The Large Glass* in spite of its transparency. The column in Wall's photograph similarly interrupts our navigation of the

pictorial space laterally, even though a closer look reveals the open access to the enclosed pool area on the right. As for the gendering of space in *Morning Cleaning*, correspondences with what Duchamp termed the 'cinematic blossoming'[17] of the Bride above her Bachelors are not difficult to discern: the nude figure of *Dawn* in the moment before her unveiling is analogous to the stripped Bride arrested by her own imaginative desire, while the intent pose of the cleaner with his angled squeegee pole and wheeled bucket echoes the raised bayonet of the chocolate grinder that grinds its own chocolate, supported on its Louis XV legs. Analogies may also be made between the distribution of light and fluids in *Morning Cleaning* and the playful physics of *The Large Glass*, with its multiple references to pre-war science and mathematics: the halo of the Bride as incandescent light bulb, the liquefaction of the Bride's love gasoline, and the onanistic 'splashing' of the bachelors.[18]

However, *The Large Glass* is notoriously labyrinthine with its allegorical structure of image and text in the form of the *Green Box* and other published notes, and it is not my intention here to interpret Wall's work through a simplistic iconographical mapping. Rather, considering *Morning Cleaning* as a Duchampian delay within the historical context of the pavilion it pictures, opens up a reading beyond thwarted sexual desire, and towards an allegory of the frustrated dreams of the modernist avant-garde to engage meaningfully with those of the proletariat, a failure at the heart of Wall's critique of conceptual art. Wall's awareness of the failure of conceptualism's self-reflexive practice to effectively engage the social class that had inspired the earlier avant-garde presented an artistic conundrum. In his 1982 essay, 'Dan Graham's Kammerspiel',[19] Graham's work suggests a way out to him:

> Graham begins from the failure of conceptualism's critique of art. But his intention is not to celebrate that failure and to throw away the lessons of the radical art of the 1960s. . . . Rather, he intends with the *Alteration* project to build a critical memorial to that failure. And, in the spirit of the movement he memorializes, he builds it as a countermonument.[20]

In what follows, I will argue that Wall effectively returns to this strategy of the 'countermonument' in *Morning Cleaning*, and does so in ways resonant with the politics of modernist glass architecture set out in the Kammerspiel essay.

Reading Wall's lengthy and densely argued essay on Graham's *Alteration to a Suburban House* (1978) with an eye to *Morning Cleaning* is an experience not unlike reading Duchamp's notes in relation to *The Large Glass*. Indeed, in his essay 'The artiste', Blake Stimson, while highly critical of Wall's advocacy of Graham over other conceptual artists in the Kammerspiel essay, includes *Morning Cleaning* amongst the illustrations for his argument without comment, as if to suggest that their correspondence is self-evident.[21] Wall's central concern in his essay is to situate Graham's project in relation to the symbolism of the glass architecture pioneered by Mies van der Rohe: the glass skyscraper and the glass house. For Wall, the revolutionary ideals of Weimar culture find only a faint echo in the Mies of the American Bauhaus, whose glass tower, with its asymmetric relations of surveillance and visibility, came to symbolize the sophisticated post-war corporate system that had 'integrated all the massive systems of bureaucratic control and technological expedience identified with totalitarianism in the 1930s'.[22] Stimson drives the point home: 'more than any other single form, it might be

said, the glass wall has operated as a motif for both the promise and the failure of enlightenment, and with it, both the promise and the failure of modernity.'[23] As an icon of the 'new American neocapitalist city'[24] the glass tower found its domestic counterpart in the glass villas anticipated by Mies's German pavilion and designed to house America's elite. And it is the phantasmatic specular relations of these glass villas that are central to Wall's analysis.

Alteration to a Suburban House was not actually realized but became known through photographs of architectural models and a published text that specifically referenced the glass houses built by Mies and Philip Johnson. Graham proposed replacing the façade of a suburban tract house with a wall of glass, while inserting a mirrored wall that bisected the house longitudinally and faced outwards, thus reflecting the street, the environment, and the façade of the identical house opposite as a kind of spectral presence. He associated the resulting effect with a 'show window display' or a 'metaphoric billboard',[25] symbols of capitalist consumerism resonant with conceptualism's critique of commodity fetishism and the spectacle, under the sway of Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt school, though I am reminded too of the eroticism of the shop window relayed by Duchamp in the *Glass*.[26] Indeed, there is a tension in Wall's essay between the poetics of surrealist glass imagery and Benjamin's more 'materialistic, anthropological'[27] concept of 'profane illumination'.[28] However, for Wall the critical mediating term for the *Alteration* project is the glass wall pioneered by Mies.

Wall's claim for Graham's *Alteration* as an intervention in 'the illusory seamlessness of social reality'[29] rests upon his analysis of the effects of power encoded in the optics of the glass house or villa, idyllically set in a privately owned parkland. And it is here that his essay is most resonant with the bifurcated field of *Morning Cleaning*. By day the glass house is a belvedere securing a sovereign view of nature, a 'regime of theoretical invisibility and blissful absorption' for its privileged male occupant.[30] But by night, the reversal of luminosity and visibility constructs a mirrored locus of phantasmatic anxiety represented by the fantasy of the vampire, an apparition trapped in the *mise-en-abyme* of reflections, that casts the glass house as a mausoleum or crypt. The apparition of the vampire emerges for Wall as a sign of residual evil inherited from the unresolved crises of the old order, a sign of uneasiness with the social order of the modern, and it figures in a number of his subsequent back-lit transparencies.[31]

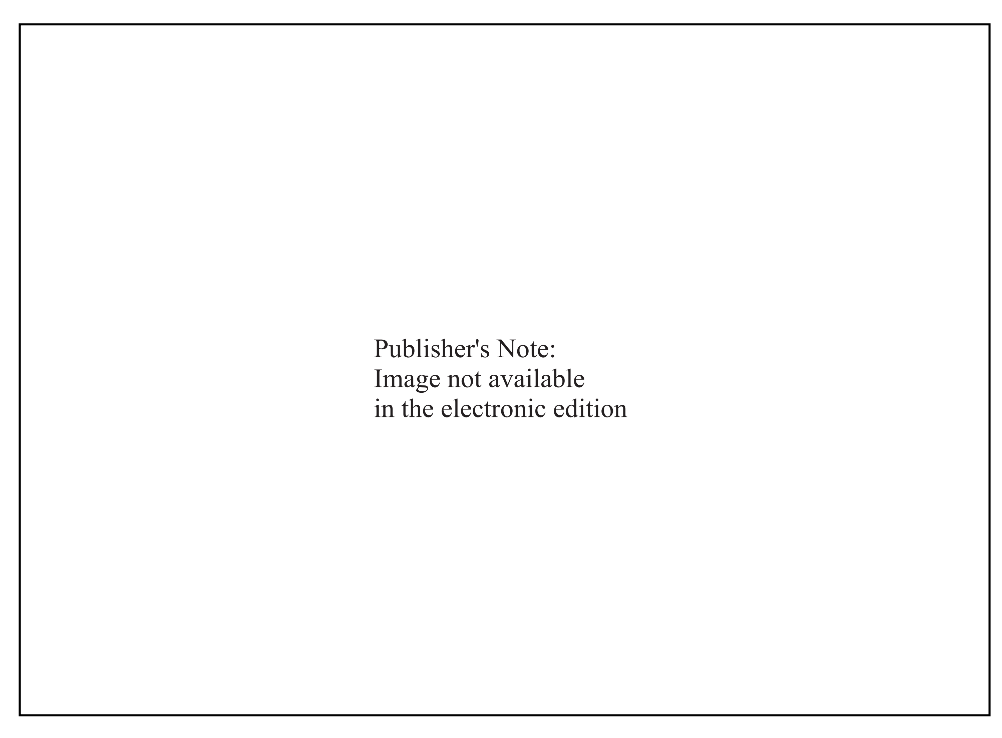
Wall observes that the mirror that bisects the house longitudinally in Graham's *Alteration* project is more highly reflective than its glass façade, and in daytime this superior reflectivity has the effect of returning the glass wall to transparency. The dichotomous relation of interior to exterior is thus cancelled, and the relations of asymmetrical social status secured by the glass house as belvedere/crypt are annulled.[32] In *Alteration*, the tyranny of the mirror reflects occupants and passers-by equally on either side of the transparent glass wall, revealing their homelessness in the oppressive greyness of suburbia, imagined earlier in his essay as 'the garden of subjection for a lost proletariat'.[33] For Wall, this transparency does not introduce a moment of liberation but a prolonged moment of traumatic truth, 'an image of historical apocalypse' and 'of the failed liberation of the world'.[34] What is revealed for him in Graham's bleak exposure of 'the vampiric nihilism hidden within high bourgeois art-culture' is the defeatism of the conceptualist strategy of intervention which, detached from the working class as a social force, can only

intervene in the name of art itself.[35] Hence, he understands Graham's project as 'an antimonumental memorial to conceptualism's limitations'.[36]

This strategy of the countermonument as a moment of traumatic transparency is worth considering in relation to *Morning Cleaning*, for certainly the Barcelona Pavilion invokes a fraught relation to history and memory. In his essay, 'Body in pieces: desiring the Barcelona Pavilion', George Dodds declares the 1929 German Pavilion to be 'a virtual ur-hut of modernity, [yet] the one building by Mies about which the least can be said with certainty'.[37] Though a temporary building, dismantled in 1930 after only seven months, the German Pavilion has been enormously influential as the privileged architectural signifier of the utopian values of the avant-garde – the Mies of the Bauhaus and the November Gruppe, of such polemical magazines as *G* and *Frühlicht* – at the moment before the catastrophe of Fascism. At the same time, it is the vanguard of the International Style and of the eventual inversion of Weimar values by the modernism of the American Mies, subsumed into the Cold War corporate agenda, about which Wall writes: 'Mies's architecture, in invoking through its purity the consciousness of its own vanquishment, maintains thereby a faint echo of the unfulfilled hopes of the period of optimism. It therefore remains significant as a negative symbol and, if it is looked at historically, takes on, however weakly, some characteristics of the antimonument.'[38] Given the status of the 1929 pavilion as a site of lost hopes and desires, what might it mean for Wall to photograph the reconstructed pavilion that opened to the public in Barcelona in 1986?

PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE DREAM OF MODERNITY

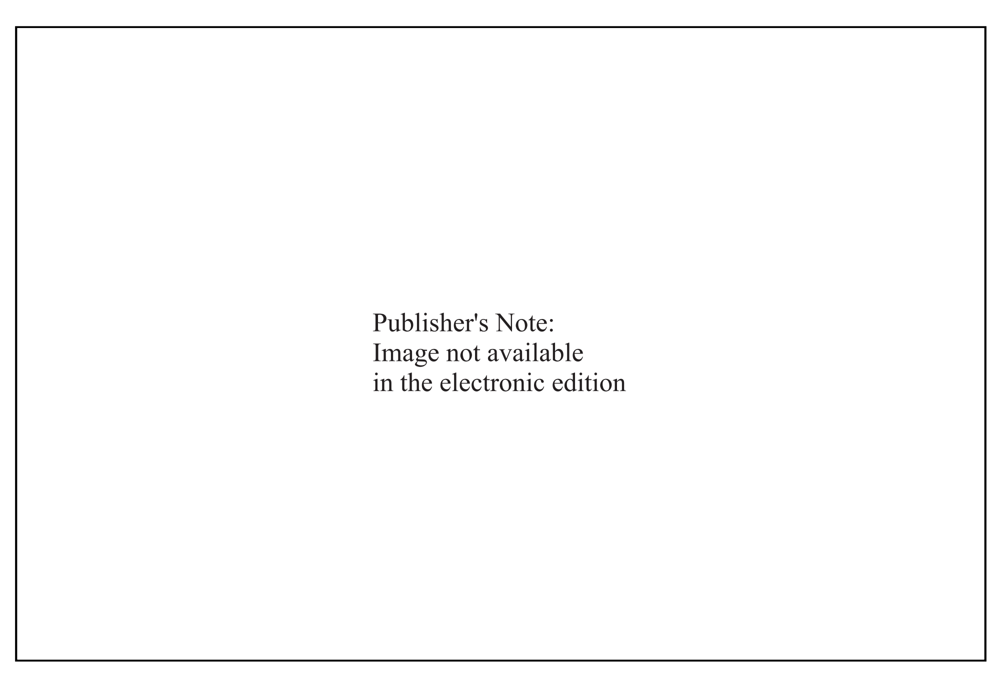
George Dodds tells us: 'The story of the Barcelona Pavilion is intrinsically related to the medium through which it has been primarily apprehended, before its demolition and after – photography'.[39] Dodds is primarily concerned with the thirteen master prints from 1929 housed in the Mies van der Rohe Archive at the Museum of Modern Art known as the *Berliner Bild-Bericht* photos.[40] While the catalogue of the International Exposition has some photos that include people, the *Bild-Bericht* photos, reproduced in virtually every monograph, article and textbook on Mies's work, depict a pavilion in the form of a house where no one ever seems to be home.[41] Rather, their myriad reflections (plate 6) and carefully arranged custom designed furniture cleansed of any trace of experience (the famous Barcelona chairs designed with Lily Reich), suggest an inversion of Walter Benjamin's 'phantasmagoria of the interior',[42] whereby décor is returned to the status of the fetishized commodity. Wall explicitly makes this connection to the *unheimlich* (unhomelike), uncanny dwelling in his Kammerspiel essay.[43] It is these photos, preserving the 'timeless perfection of the pavilion's mirror-like walls',[44] that Mies valued and took to America, while forgoing the opportunity to preserve the actual pavilion.[45] And, according to Dodds, Mies's soaring reputation by the late 1940s was, alarmingly for some contemporaries, almost entirely based upon photographs of projects that his peers had never seen.[46] The master prints are the only photographic images of the pavilion that he approved for printing after moving to Chicago. This authoritative status accounts for the fact that they formed the primary basis for the reconstruction in the 1980s along with some original sketches and plans of dubious accuracy. Dodds argues that photography has played a central role in the 'sedimentation of mythology' around the pavilion,



6 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (architect), Williams & Meyer Co. (photographic studio), Interior view of the German Pavilion at the Barcelona International Exposition, 1929–30, Barcelona, Spain. Gelatine silver print, 16.3 × 22.9 cm. Montréal: Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture (Gift of Edward Austin Duckett). Photo: © CCA, Montréal/Lohan Associates/DACS, 2009.

generating 'what appears to be a kind of delirium in those who attempt to interpret the image of this building . . . the *Bild-Bericht* prints must be understood not only as the figure of a building but also as the reflection of a desire – a collective desire to inhabit the unstable image of what has become, during this century, a reoccurring dream of modernity.'[47]

Like Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, also known mostly through photographs, the German Pavilion inspires fantasy. At the opening in Barcelona in 1986, Mies's daughter Georgia praised it as one of the most beautiful buildings of our century, stating 'now, we can even touch the onyx wall',[48] referring to the marvellous piece of onyx doré illuminated in *Morning Cleaning*. This revealing slippage that fails to distinguish between original and reconstruction, that is to say, between two disparate historical moments disavows crucial differences in the respective pavilions' functions. The 1929 pavilion was intended as a reception space for the inauguration by King Alfonso XIII and worked in conjunction with the displays of German industrial products in the exhibition hall designed by Mies and Lily Reich (plate 7), to present, as Josep Quetglas tells us, the modern German soul as a function of work: 'modernised, transparent, crystalline, electric'.[49] This was a moment of confluence between the language of avant-garde utopianism and the rhetoric of the Social Democrats, however much Walter Benjamin later decried their vision of technologized labour as progress.[50] However, the reconstructed



Publisher's Note:
Image not available
in the electronic edition

7 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, View of the I. G. Farben exhibit, Barcelona International Exposition 1929–30, German Section, Spain. Gelatine silver print, 10 × 14.8 cm. New York: Museum of Modern Art (Anonymous gift, AD163). Photo: © The Museum of Modern Art/SCALA/ARS, NY (2009)/DACS, 2009.

pavilion speaks to another historical moment of late capitalism, where the pavilion itself is the display, so that the vision of the worker in *Morning Cleaning* is not the heroic, masculine figure of industrial production, but the somewhat feminized maintenance worker associated with minimum wages and tourism.[51] The reconstructed pavilion is a museum, a tourist attraction, a ruin, emptied of utopian social meaning, a testament to the death of the avant-garde, offering instead aesthetic pleasure in the petrified beauty of Mies's rich, reflective materials. As such it calls to mind what Wall declares to be the question posed by conceptualism: 'What is the process in which the cultural crisis is not resolved socially, but transmuted into sublime fixation upon immobilized symbols and fetishes?'[52]

A similar anxiety seems to have provoked the subversive exhibit organized by the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas and his Office of Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) for the Milan Triennale in 1985 – a response to the reconstruction in Barcelona. As Derek Sayer recounts, Koolhaas raised the question of how fundamentally did this 'clone of Mies's pavilion ... differ from Disney'. Koolhaas continues:

> In the name of a higher authenticity we researched the true history of the pavilion after the closing of the 1929 World's Fair and collected whatever archaeological remnants it has left across Europe on its return journey. Like a Pompeian villa, these fragments were reassembled as far as possible to suggest the former whole, but with one inevitable inaccuracy: since our 'site' was curved, the pavilion had to be 'bent'.[53]

Koolhaas and OMA created an absurdly fictitious account of the fate of the original pavilion, performing a vicarious witnessing of the events following its actual dismantling in 1930: the Spanish Civil War, Nazi spectacles, the massive bombing of Germany, Cold War politics in East Germany, and finally the discovery of the pavilion's remnants by a Western scientist.

THE MIMETIC GAME

In his essay 'Three thoughts on photography' written in 1999, the same year as *Morning Cleaning*, Wall declares: 'Now I see the possibility of developing a mimesis of photography, as photography.'[54] What he means by this is that photography as a printed medium has joined the older media of painting and drawing as 'unilluminated', that is, not illuminated in the manner of his back-lit transparencies, and hence, not reliant upon electricity in order to be seen. So while in the past Wall has used paintings as models for his back-lit photos, now he can include print photography in what he calls 'the mimetic game'. I propose that *Morning Cleaning*, then, is a mimesis of the *Bild-Bericht* prints of 1929.

In an interview with Craig Burnett, Wall reveals that his photograph was taken only five inches away from one of the cardinal points in the standard photographic views of the pavilion.[55] That 'standard view', by my measurements, is the *Bild-Bericht* photo illustrated in plate 4 in which *Dawn* is illuminated by the morning sun.[56] While Wall has stepped back to allow for greater distance from the column, the horizontal scope that encompasses the window on the right with the red curtain is a function of his cinematographic method of shooting the scene. *Morning Cleaning* is more emphatically horizontal in its proportions than any of the *Bild-Bericht* photographs.[57] The other crucial difference is in the effects of light. In both of the standard views of the 'throne room' (plates 3 and 4) the lighting feeds the illusion of the veined marble wall as an organic presence, continuous with the landscape of cypresses and conifers beyond. It also renders the tinted glass wall nearly opaque in a manner that suggests the reversal of luminosity of the glass house at night, as described in the Kammerspiel essay. Note that this lighting effect is not consistent across the master prints, as can be seen in the virtual transparency of the window in plate 6.[58] In *Morning Cleaning* Wall chooses the same time of day as his model but his lighting reverses the relationship of visibility. The marble is in sharper focus so that the architectural enclosure is distinct from the foliage beyond and, hearkening back to Graham's *Alteration* project, the glass wall is transparent so that inside and outside are continuous. Except, that is, for the provisional interference of the soapy film that anticipates the moment of awakening, heralded by the beam of light on the onyx wall. The anamorphic *Dawn*, caught in an ambiguous movement (greeting the sun? protecting herself from its glare?) threatens to disrupt the tranquillity of the house, heralded in 1929 as a symbol of the new German spirit: transparent, forthright, honest and pacified.[59] Meanwhile, the window cleaner remains caught in the midst of the repetitive task of removing all traces of lived experience, restoring decorum.

As a mimesis of a photograph, *Morning Cleaning* functions allegorically as a palimpsest to overwrite the erection of the Barcelona pavilion as fetish, as a symbol of a history emptied of social meaning, as a monument to architectural

modernism that covers over the traumatic history of modernity in the intervening years between the indexical moment of the *Bild-Bericht* photo and its own. It functions then as a countermonument, calling into question the premises of its own construction, a concept that took on particular significance during the 1980s as the generation of Germans born after 1945 wrestled with Germany's 'memorial conundrum' and the need to comprehend the historical gap between the Holocaust and their own lived experience.[60] The same year that the Barcelona Pavilion was opened, Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz unveiled their *Monument against Fascism* in Harburg, a *Gegen-Denkmal* (countermonument) designed to slowly sink into the ground and disappear. However, whereas projects like the Gerzes' were participatory sites for the work of memory and mourning, *Morning Cleaning* remains a picture in an exhibition.

MEMORY AND ENIGMA

It seems that Duchamp had a secret intention when designing the installation of his work at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1954. According to his biographer, Calvin Tomkins, the door-like window visible in plate 5 facing onto the courtyard with its large fountain 'had been cut into the wall on his instructions'.[61] On the other side of the fountain, directly in line with the Glider in *The Large Glass*, stood a nude female figure in bronze depicting a Brazilian water nymph called *Yara* (plate 8). This sculpture, which remains in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, was created by the Brazilian artist Maria Martins, a married woman with whom Duchamp had a passionate, clandestine affair during the 1940s in New York.[62] She eventually ended the relationship despite his entreaties to leave her husband, the Brazilian ambassador to Washington, and her family. Martins was the 'Maria' in the original title of *Etant donnés*[63] and it is supposed that she was the model for the female nude in that work so shockingly displayed when installed, after Duchamp's death in 1968, just a few steps away from the *Glass*. Indeed, for many years she was the only one who knew that Duchamp was working on what would eventually become *Etant Donnés*, referred to in their correspondence as '*N.D. [Notre Dame] des désires*'.[64] The significance of this sight-line that connects the two 'Brides' who were beyond Duchamp's grasp was not revealed until the early 1990s.[65]

It is open to conjecture whether Wall is making an ironic reference to this fact in *Morning Cleaning*, but he does nonetheless enjoy secrets of his own. That is to say that Wall may have his own cause for the kind of personal satisfaction that Duchamp enjoyed in viewing *The Large Glass* installed. However, in *Morning Cleaning* this privileged knowledge concerns a dark and enigmatic presence that points not to unfulfilled passion, but to the historical trauma covered over by the pavilion as fetish.

In 1999, Wall was invited by Hilda Teerlinck, curator at the Mies van der Rohe Foundation, to exhibit in the pavilion in Barcelona as part of a larger project of artists' dialogues with the architecture. This gained him the cooperation of the Mies van der Rohe Foundation to photograph *Morning Cleaning*, and by Wall's account, allowed him to further investigate, by way of the window washer tableau, a theme explored in other works: cleaning.[66] In *Just Washed*, 1997, for instance, a soiled white cloth, not unlike the one on the floor in *Morning Cleaning*, is held above an open washing machine in a manner mimicking an ad for laundry detergent.



8 Maria Martins, *Yara*, *c*. 1940. Bronze sculpture, 207.6 × 71.1 × 73.7 cm. Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art (Purchased with funds from an anonymous donor, 1942). Photo: Philadelphia Museum of Art.

The ambiguity of the title suggests that cleaning is a repetitious, cyclical activity that does not eliminate dirt but merely displaces it from one surface area to another – removes it from view. This persistence of dirt and its attendant anxiety in Western culture takes on symbolic weight when we consider the works installed in the pavilion for Teerlinck's project: an earlier back-lit transparency entitled *Odradek, Taboritska 8, Prague, 18 July 1994* (1994) (plate 9) and a small sculpture called *Odradek* which can be seen in plate 10 positioned next to the marble wall and just beyond the red curtain. The entry in the *Jeff Wall Catalogue Raisonné* explains that two of these wooden spool-like pieces were made in case one was damaged, hence, *Double Odradek* (plate 11).[67] The artist housed them in a wooden case reminiscent of the croquet box used by Duchamp in 1936 to assemble his *3 Standard Stoppages*, 1913–14, even including a package of beeswax for conservation purposes. While both the transparency and the sculpture were present during Wall's filming, neither of these works is visible in *Morning Cleaning*.[68] Yet, considering them here further substantiates my claims for *Morning Cleaning* as countermonument.

Odradek is an enigmatic creature that figures in a short story by Franz Kafka, written in 1919, entitled 'Die Sorge des Hausvaters' translated as 'The Cares of a Family Man'.[69] The story has been reproduced as a text panel to accompany the back-lit photograph *Odradek, Taboritska 8, Prague, 18 July 1994* and was selected by Wall to be included in his Phaidon monograph, under the rubric of 'artist's choice'. Here is an excerpt:

> At first glance it looks like a flat star-shaped spool for thread, and indeed it does seem to have thread wound upon it; to be sure, they are only old, broken-off bits of thread, knotted and tangled together, of the most varied sorts and colours. But it is not only a spool, for a small wooden crossbar sticks out of the middle of the star, and another small rod is joined to that at a right angle. By means of this latter rod on one side and one of the points of the star on the other, the whole thing can stand upright as if on two legs.[70]

In Kafka's story, Odradek vacillates between inanimate object and live creature and 'lurks by turns in the garret, the stairway, the lobbies, the entrance hall'.[71]



9 Jeff Wall, *Odradek, Táboritská 8, Prague, 18 July 1994*, 1994. Transparency in light-box, 229 × 289 cm. Photo: © Jeff Wall.



10 Jeff Wall, *Odradek*, installation view, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona, Spain, 1999. Photo: Biel Capploch, Barcelona. © Jeff Wall.



11 Jeff Wall, *Double Odradek*, 1999. Each sculpture 18.5 × 16 × 26.3 cm; case 9.5 × 60.5 × 22.5 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt Am Main/Axel Schneider. © Jeff Wall.

This is what we see in *Odradek, Taboritska 8, Prague, 18 July 1994*, albeit with some difficulty, as the young woman descending the staircase is oblivious to the barely detectable presence of Odradek on the stained floor adjacent to the stairs. Odradek is nimble and eludes close scrutiny, though he can be heard laughing – a sound like 'the rustling of fallen leaves'.[72] The allusion to Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, 1912, and by association the chronophotography of Étienne-Jules Marey, has been taken up by Jean-Christophe Ammann and Michael Newman, though in an interview with Craig Burnett, Wall has flatly denied any such reference.[73] Newman extends his reading to include the sink in the foreground as Duchamp's readymade urinal *Fountain*, 1917.[74] His argument that Wall is critiquing the readymade here connects the figure of Odradek with the genealogy of failed modernism elucidated in Wall's Kammerspiel essay. The anxiety to which the readymade gives expression in Wall's account is compared to the painful speculation of the 'Family Man' or father/narrator in Kafka's story that Odradek, a useless object that will never wear out or die, will likely outlive him, his children, and his children's children, persisting across the generations.[75] If indeed one can argue for *Odradek, Táboritská 8, Prague, 18 July 1994* (a title that suggests a snapshot) as some kind of commentary on the readymade, I am inclined to view the shadow of the spigot in light of Duchamp's *Tu m'*, 1918, as an indexical sign that points to the soiled and stained surfaces of this bleak interior, so sharply illuminated by the photographer's equipment, as historical traces.

The rich commentary on Odradek circulates around the tropes of memory, mourning, and the dread of the uncanny. In his Kafka essay, Walter Benjamin

aligns Odradek with the vectors of guilt and forgetfulness. He writes: 'in Kafka's work, the most singular bastard which the prehistoric world has begotten with guilt in Kafka is Odradek. . . . Odradek is the form that things assume in oblivion. They are distorted.'[76] Rebecca Comay identifies Odradek as the name of the bobbin Freud's grandson played with so famously in the game of *Fort-Da*, a game of disappearance and return beneath the curtain surrounding his crib, allegorically signifying the work of mourning, 'the impossibility of all restitution and as such the radical *Unheimlichkeit* of every home'.[77] Slavoj Žižek, in his essay 'Odradek as a political category' describes Odradek as 'a partial object', the 'inhuman-human "undead" organ without a body', a kind of remainder of the Life-Substance that escapes symbolic colonization.[78] His recognition of Odradek in relation to Lacan's myth of the lamella, a figure of pure libido that escapes the mortality of sexuated generative beings, leads him to link Kafka's creature to the alien in the Ridley Scott film of that name, and thus to a latent horror commensurate with 'the Real as the monstrous thing behind the veil of appearances'.[79] Žižek's essay aligns Odradek etymologically with the Greek dodekaedron, a volume of twelve faces, each of them a pentagon. But as you can see, Wall's Odredek is not a pentagon at all. It is clearly a six-pointed star.

Wall recounts his trip to Prague in 1994 as a kind of game to hunt for Odradek: 'If Odradek had survived the Holocaust (and I think he is one of those most likely to have done so) he'd be hanging around where he always hangs around. He wouldn't have gone anywhere.'[80] Though the address Taboritska 8 is not related to Kafka particularly, it evokes, through the liminal presence of Odradek, the lost culture of Central European Jewry that survives in Kafka's writing. This dilapidated house in Prague that has borne witness to the failures of utopian modernism in the twentieth century is, in its murky accretions and sad decrepitude, the antithesis of the pristine pavilion filmed by Wall at the end of the millennium. The resonance of its installation in Mies's space as a photographic image along with the sculpture Odradek, scarcely needs further elaboration, even without knowledge of Wall's own Jewish heritage.[81] But what of its haunting presence in *Morning Cleaning*?

In *Morning Cleaning*, what is rendered invisible by Wall's cinematographic technique is the temporal unfolding of the extended filming process. Unlike the disjuncture of avant-garde photomontage that exposed social contradictions – in Benjamin's view, a modern form of allegorical critique – Wall's cinematographic photography presents a seamless view more reminiscent of the montage in architectural drawings. It establishes a spatial continuity and intimacy that allows him, he claims, to negotiate 'phantom identifications' without drawing sharp distinctions 'between the prosaic and the spectral, between the factual and the fantastic, and by extension between the documentary and the imaginary'.[82] Odradek is just such a phantom of transgenerational memory.

Wall has suggested somewhat playfully that the Kammerspiel essay was a sort of Duchampian delay with respect to his longtime interest in art criticism.[83] My argument leads to the conclusion that *Morning Cleaning* is also a Duchampian delay that, perhaps more than any other work by Wall, transforms the locus of concerns that informed that essay into a picture. But a picture where the insistent bifurcation of the visual field reminds us of the illusionary reality obtained through the persistence of vision, the very basis of the cinematic apparatus, and provokes a double look that leaves us caught by desire.

Notes

I would like to thank Tamara Trodd for her delightful enthusiasm in response to this chapter at the AAH conference in 2008 and especially for alerting me to the presence of Maria Martins' sculpture at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. I have benefited from conversations with Michael Taylor at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and from the commentary of faculty at Carleton University, where I presented a version of this chapter at the Art History Colloquium in Visual Culture. I am deeply grateful to Margaret Iversen and Diarmuid Costello for including me in their project and for their perceptive comments and direction in shaping this chapter. And I further appreciate the careful consideration and insights of my reader which have helped me immensely in clarifying my argument.

1 The figure of Dawn in the pool of the reconstructed pavilion is a cast replica of the original bronze sculpture that was used in 1929. See George Dodds, *Building Desire*, London and New York, 2005, 18.

2 Description of the project by Jeff Wall in Michael Fried, 'Jeff Wall, Wittgenstein, and the Everyday', *Critical Inquiry*, 33: 3, 2007, 515.

3 Penelope Curtis, 'The modern eye-catcher: Mies van der Rohe and sculpture', *Arq*, 7: 3/4, 2003, 361.

4 Curtis, 'The modern eye-catcher', 369.

5 Theodora Vischer and Heidi Naef, eds, *Jeff Wall: Catalogue Raisonné 1978–2004*, Basel and Göttingen, 2005, 393.

6 Fried, 'Jeff Wall', 519.

7 Wall's statement, 2002, cited in Fried, 'Jeff Wall', 506.

8 Fried, 'Jeff Wall', 518.

9 Fried, 'Jeff Wall', 525.

10 This reading of *Morning Cleaning* in relation to *The Large Glass* was initially formulated in response to Michael Fried's lecture 'Jeff Wall, Wittgenstein, and the everyday' at the National Gallery of Canada, 10 September 2006.

11 Rosalind Krauss, 'The blink of an eye', in David Carroll, ed., *The States of 'Theory*, New York, 1990, 175–99.

12 Michael Newman, 'Towards the reinvigoration of the "Western tableau": some notes on Jeff Wall and Duchamp', *Oxford Art Journal*, 30: 1, 2007, 86.

13 Michael Newman, 'Towards the reinvigoration of the "Western tableau"', 81.

14 'Interview between Jeff Wall and Jean-François Chevrier: writing on art (2001)', in *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews*, New York, 2007, 320.

15 Michael Newman, 'Towards the reinvigoration of the "Western tableau"', 85.

16 Newman, 'Towards the reinvigoration of the "Western tableau"', 86.

17 'The cinematic blossoming is the most important part of the painting . . . It is, in general, the halo of the bride.' Marcel Duchamp, *Notes and Projects for The Large Glass*, Intro. Arturo Schwarz, New York, 1969, 26.

18 Though it may only be coincidental, Duchamp's etching *The Large Glass Completed*, 1965, identifies the upper left area of the Bachelors' glass pane as the 'region of the waterfall' (Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in the Large Glass and Related Works*, Princeton, NJ, 1998, fig. 77) while his notes reveal that soapy water or tinted glass were, in fact, the materials he considered in order to 'provide a provisional opacity made by the splashes from upstream and down'. Duchamp, *Notes and Projects*, 54, 122.

19 Jeff Wall, 'Dan Graham's Kammerspiel', in *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews*, New York, 2007, 31–75.

20 Wall, 'Kammerspiel', 31.

21 Blake Stimson, 'The artiste', *Oxford Art Journal*, 30: 1, 2007, 101–15.

22 Wall, 'Kammerspiel', 50.

23 Stimson, 'The artiste', 105.

24 Wall, 'Kammerspiel', 50.

25 Wall, 'Kammerspiel', 48.

26 Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 173–4.

27 Detlef Mertins, 'The enticing and threatening face of prehistory: Walter Benjamin and the utopia of glass', *Assemblage*, 29, April 1996, 10.

28 Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism: the last snapshot of the European intelligentsia', in Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, eds, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934*, Cambridge, MA and London, 1999, 209.

29 Wall, 'Kammerspiel', 65.

30 Wall, 'Kammerspiel', 60.

31 Tom Holert considers the figure of the vampire as a 'symbolic prosthesis' for the artist's own subjectivity as it is inscribed in the specular relations of his cinematographic photos, including *Morning Cleaning*. See Tom Holert, 'Interview with a vampire: subjectivity and visuality in the works of Jeff Wall', *Jeff Wall: Photographs: MUMOK*, Wien and Köln, 2003, 128–37.

32 Wall, 'Kammerspiel', 67.

33 Wall, 'Kammerspiel', 43.
34 Wall, 'Kammerspiel', 69.
35 Wall, 'Kammerspiel', 75.
36 Wall, 'Kammerspiel', 73.
37 George Dodds, 'Body in pieces: desiring the Barcelona Pavilion', *Res*, 39, 2001, 173.
38 Wall, 'Kammerspiel', 56.
39 Dodds, 'Body in pieces', 169.
40 The most comprehensive study of these master prints is Dodds, *Building Desire*.
41 Dodds, 'Body in pieces', 174.
42 Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, the capital of the nineteenth century', in Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, eds, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 3: 1935–1938*, Cambridge, MA and London, 2002, 38.
43 Wall, 'Kammerspiel', 54.
44 Dodds, 'Body in pieces', 174.
45 One explanation that George Dodds offers for Mies's indifference to the fate of the building once the Bild-Bericht photos had been taken is that 'the power of these photographic images would be substantially intensified by the erasure of the building', in *Building Desire*, 120.
46 Dodds, 'Body in pieces', 183.
47 Dodds, 'Body in pieces', 174.
48 Remei Capdevila Werning, 'Construing reconstruction: The Barcelona Pavilion and Nelson Goodman's aesthetic philosophy', MS Thesis, MIT, 2007, 42.
49 Josep Quetglas, *Fear of Glass: Mies van der Rohe's Pavilion in Barcelona*, Basel, Boston, Berlin, 2001, 27.
50 Walter Benjamin, 'On the concept of history', in Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, eds, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938–1940*, Cambridge, MA and London, 2003, 393.
51 Wall describes the three people responsible for cleaning the Barcelona Pavilion: Victor the supervisor, Alejandro who is in the photograph, and Esperanza. He adds 'Esperanza's view is that men don't know how to clean', in Vischer and Naef, *Jeff Wall: Catalogue Raisonné*, 393.
52 Wall, 'Kammerspiel', 33.
53 Derek Sayer, 'The unbearable lightness of building: a cautionary tale', *Grey Room*, 16, 2004, 8.
54 Jeff Wall, 'Three thoughts on photography (1999)', in Vischer and Naef, *Jeff Wall: Catalogue Raisonné*, 441. While the essay was not published until 2005, Wall discussed the possibilities of 'a photographic mimesis of photography' in 1998. See 'Boris Groys in conversation with Jeff Wall', in *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews*, 299.
55 Craig Burnett, *Jeff Wall*, London, 2005, 90–1.
56 Dodds, *Building Desire*, 70, fig 2.4.
57 For an inventory and dimensions of the photos in the MoMA collection see Dodds, *Building Desire*, 47 n 3.
58 Dodds, *Building Desire*, 71, fig 2.5.
59 The status of the pavilion as a 'home' was remarked in a French review of the 1929 pavilion, which interpreted its tranquil domesticity in terms of German appeasement: 'Voilà la maison tranquille de l'Allemagne apaisée!' Tuduri, Nicolas M. Rubio, 'Le Pavillon de l'Allemagne à l'Exposition de Barcelone', *Cahiers d'Art*, 4, 1929, 9.
60 James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, New Haven and London, 1993, 27. See especially Chapter 1, 'The countermonument: memory against itself in Germany'.
61 Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography*, New York, 1996, 389.
62 I am indebted to Tamara Trodd for drawing my attention to the existence of Maria Martins' sculpture *Yara* in the courtyard, in response to my paper at the session 'Photography after Conceptual Art' at the Association of Art Historians Conference, London, 2008. Every effort has been made to contact the copyright holder of this work of art.
63 The first study for the secret work is a signed pencil drawing dated 1947 with the handwritten title *Etant donnés: Maria, la chute d'eau et le gaz d'éclairage*. Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 357.
64 'Our Lady of Desires', Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 366.
65 Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 217. Francis M. Naumann includes an illustration of *Yara* in *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Ghent and Amsterdam, 1999.
66 Burnett, *Jeff Wall*, 76.
67 Vischer and Naef, *Jeff Wall: Catalogue Raisonné*, 392.
68 While Wall does not recall the exact location of the light-box transparency in the Barcelona pavilion, he did confirm that the wooden sculpture was present during the photographing of *Morning Cleaning*. Email correspondence 2 November 2008.
69 Franz Kafka, *Franz Kafka: The Complete Stories*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer, New York, 1972.
70 Thierry De Duve, Arielle Pelenc, Boris Groys and Jean-François Chevrier, *Jeff Wall*, London, 2002, 72.
71 De Duve et al., *Jeff Wall*, 72.
72 De Duve et al., *Jeff Wall*, 72.
73 See Jean-Christophe Ammann, '*Odradek, Táboritská 8, Prague, 18 July 1994*', *Jeff Wall: Figures and Places, Selected Works from 1978–2000*, ed. Rolf Lauter, Munich and New York, 2001, 136–7; Michael Newman, 'Jeff Wall's pictures: knowledge and enchantment', *Flash Art*, 28: 181, March-April 1995, 78; Newman, 'The true appearance of Jeff Wall's pictures', *Jeff Wall*, Tilburg, 1994, 29–31. Craig Burnett's interview with the artist is in Burnett, *Jeff Wall*, 77.
74 Newman, 'Towards the reinvigoration of the "Western tableau"', 94.
75 He quotes Wall as follows: 'The celebrated anxiety to which the Readymade gives expres-

sion is one generated by the glimpse it gives of a future implied by the eternity of the commodity, the endless rule of the abject object.' Newman, 'Towards the reinvigoration of the ''Western Tableau''', 94 n 37.

76 Walter Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka', in Jennings et al., *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2*, 810–11.

77 Rebecca Comay, 'Mourning work and play', *Research in Phenomenology*, 23: 1, 1993, 111.

78 Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, Cambridge, MA and London, 2006, 119–20.

79 Slavoj Žižek, 'Troubles with the real: Lacan as a viewer of alien', in *How to Read Lacan*,.http://www.lacan.com/zizalien.htm. Žižek uses the term sexuation, coined by Jacques Lacan in his Seminar XX (1972), to specify the production of a sexed subject position that is not determined by anatomy or gender.

80 Burnett, *Jeff Wall*, 76.

81 Arthur Lubow, 'Jeff Wall: the luminist', *The New York Times Magazine*, 25 February 2007, 58 (L).

82 'At home and elsewhere: a dialogue in Brussels between Jeff Wall and Jean-François Chevrier (1998)', in *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews*, New York, 2007, 292.

83 'Interview between Jeff Wall and Jean-François Chevrier: writing on art (2001)', 317.

INDEX

Note: Page numbers in *italics* refer to illustrations.

 ISBN: 978-1-444-33360-2